DETERMINING IF THE ACTIONS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN COMBAT FORCES DURING WORLD WAR I POSITIVELY AFFECTED THE EMPLOYMENT OF AFRICAN AMERICAN COMBAT SOLDIERS DURING WORLD WAR II

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The purpose of this thesis is to examine if the United States government considered the voluntary services of World War I African American combat soldiers during the inter-war years and determined them to be combat multipliers for future conflicts. The research identified trends of African American service from the Revolutionary War thru their actions along the Mexican border during the first decade of the twentieth century. Recruiting, assessment, and induction practices of the War Department in its preparation for the Great War, while critiquing the impact of Jim Crow practices on this process of African American troop force generation where explored. Included are the efforts of civil rights organizations, civil rights leaders, statesmen, soldiers, and the media (national and international) to influence African American combat participation either positively or negatively.

The research determined that in World War I the African American combat soldier's experiences did not significantly change the segregated employment practices of World War II; however, there were shifts in training opportunities and leadership positions. Civilian activists used documented sources of combat utilization during the Great War to reinforce their positions for increased African American combat employment during World War II. These changes were made via civilian- military relations between members of congress, the War Department, African American/ mainstream media, and leaders of organizations for social change.

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ABSTRACT

DETERMINING IF THE ACTIONS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN COMBAT FORCES DURING WORLD WAR I POSITIVELY AFFECTED THE EMPLOYMENT OF AFRICAN AMERICAN COMBAT SOLDIERS DURING WORLD WAR II, by Oscar W. Doward Jr., 96 pages.

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THE STATUS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN SOLDIERS AT THE START OF WORLD WAR II

American Racial Sensibilities at the Beginning of World War II

African Americans made up slightly more than 10 percent of the American population during the earliest stages of World War II. The social and economic barriers to African American prosperity were as stringent in 1940 as they were in the early 1900s. Separate, but equal, policies were the norm throughout the American southern states. Jim Crow's influence sustained its effort to thwart African American political participation in order to draft legislation to improve their chances of social and economic equality. However, advocates for the advancement of African American civil rights made definitive progress during this period of American history. The nation's experiences during World War I necessitated the utilization of African Americans as combatants to procure victory in Europe. Were their (African American Soldiers) sacrifices a factor in gaining a better footing along the path to civil liberation in the early stages of World War II? This chapter will identify both the American public's and the United States Army's general perceptions of African American Soldiers during preparation for combat from 1939 to 1940. Additionally, it will address the national policies formulated in response to the building of American combat power while using African American servicemen. The African American Soldiers have made a significant contribution to the conduct of all major American wars. It is the intent of this research to clarify if their combat experiences in the Great War were important enough to justify a pivotal shift in their initial services during World War II.

The African American press, civil rights organizations, such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and certain political figures made positive steps during the decades leading to the start of World War II. Publications such as the *Crisis,* the voice of the NAACP, and the *Pittsburgh Courier* helped to give their struggles a national platform. Civil rights leaders, such as Asa Phillip Randolph, Executive Secretary of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and Maids, made strong political strides toward better opportunities for African Americans under the Roosevelt administration. The 1940s saw the formation of the Franklin Delano Roosevelt's "black cabinet," a nongovernmental collection of black leadership that discussed strategies needed for the complete integration of African Americans in to the military and defense programs.[1] These activities displayed a positive trend for the march toward civil rights for all African Americans; however, this momentum was not as forceful in matters of military affairs.

Military senior leaders continued to embrace the concept of institutional racism at the start of the World War II. The army's perceptions were rooted in flawed reporting generated from certain African American unit actions during World War I, but this was only part of their rationalization concerning African American soldiering capabilities. The popular theory of racialism, which held that "inborn racial qualities determined the kind of culture a person could create," was held to be scientific evidence to support the claims of African American inferiority as Soldiers.[2] Racialism stated that African Americans were of weak moral fiber and were not aggressive enough to make dependable combat Soldiers. There was also the belief that African American Soldiers were incapable of controlling their tempers and sexual passions, thus making them a

hindrance to good order and discipline while under arms.[3] An Army War College study of 1925 concluded that "Atrocities connected with white women have been the cause of considerable trouble among Negroes."[4] Such allegations, when investigated, proved to be unfounded; however, this stigma proved to be influential in the army's planning for the use of African American Soldiers in the years leading up to World War II.[5] Lastly, there were fears across many segments of the American south that permeated the Army's thinking in the sustaining of African American combat units. There were two major incidents in the state of Texas concerning an African American infantry regiment during the first and second decades of the 1900s. Each incident involved an African American infantry regiment's retaliation against racist and violent behavior directed at their units, and the Soldiers' actions continued to fuel the nation's paranoia of standing, well disciplined, and armed African American Soldiers. The general consensus of Army leadership in 1940 was that African American Soldiers were valuable resources; however, they should be confined to mainly service and support operations.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt's 1940 creation of his "Black Cabinet" helped to shape racial guidelines that the armed forces would use to incorporate African American servicemen during World War II. Mary McLeod Bethune's leadership of the cabinet working in tandem with the Roosevelt War Department help to draft a seven-point policy change that was released on 9 October 1940.[6]

> 1. Negro personnel in the Army will be in proportion to that in the general population (10 percent)
> 2. Negroes will be maintained in each major branch
> 3. Negroes reserve officers will be eligible for active duty
> 4. Negroes will be allowed to compete for Officer Candidate Schools
> 5. Negroes will be trained as pilots and aviation mechanics and technical specialists.

6. Negro civilians will be offered equal opportunity for employment at arsenals and Army posts
7. Racial segregation will be maintained.[7]

These points generated waves across the Army, but the concept of segregation would continue to be an obstacle that prevented African American Soldiers from serving in certain specialties at the start of World War II, such as the Army's Signal and Air Corps.

The beginning of World War II offered the prospects of having more African American Soldiers serve than ever before. The nation's first African American flag officer, General Benjamin O. Davis, Sr. was appointed, and there was an established policy of designating no less than 10 percent of the Army's active population for African American representation. This would theoretically equate to 10 percent of the Army's service and support branches and 10 percent of the Army's combat arms; however, this would not be the case. African American servicemen never reached the 10 percent allotment as per the Roosevelt policy; however, they reached 9.68 by September 1945.[8] These numbers are actually a significant increase from the numbers of African American Soldiers who had served in World War I. Unfortunately, the African American combatant unit numbers were actually lower.

While the 92nd Infantry, 93rd Infantry, and 2nd Cavalry Divisions were stood up during World War II, very few of these combat elements saw action. Aside for the 332nd Fighter Squadron, those African American combat units that did engage in combat did so only during the final three months of the war. These numbers may suggest that the combat actions of the African American Soldier in the previous war may not have assisted in increasing the combat roles of African Americans in World War II. However, it could also be assumed that their participation contributed to the passage of an executive

order that ensured a 10 percent African American quota was extended throughout all branches under the War Department in 1940. These reforms could also be seen as a precursor to the actions of President Truman in July of 1948, an executive order that definitively demanded the desegregation of all armed forces. The following chapters will illustrate how the various components of civil rights advocacy, political figures, and military senior leaders interacted and developed African American forces for the execution of the American Expeditionary Forces' mission during World War I. It is the intent of this thesis to show the disadvantages that the African American Soldiers of this period endured, highlight their accomplishments, and conclude how or if their contributions were partially responsible for any positive adjustments in the lives of African American Soldiers at the start of World War II.

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[1]Phillip McGuire, "Judge Hastie, World War II, and Army Racism," *The Journal of Negro History* 62, no. 4 (October 1977): 3533.

[2]Phillip Gleason, *Speaking of Diversity: Language and Ethnicity in Twentieth-Century America* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 156.

[3]Sherie Mershon and Steven Schlossman, *Foxholes and Color Lines: Desegregating the U.S. Armed Forces* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 14.

[4]Army War College, "*The Use of Negro Manpower in War*," 30 October 1925, in *The Air Force Integrates: 1945-1964,* ed. Alan L. Groupman (Washington, DC: Office of Air Force History, 1978), 3.

[5]Richard M. Dalfume, *Desegregation of the U.S. Armed Forces* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1969), 18.

[6]Krewasky A. Salter, *Combat Multipliers: African American Soldiers in Four Wars* (Fort Leavenworth: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2003), 82.

[7]Ulysses Lee, *The Employment of Negro Troops* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1994), 75-76.

[8]Ibid., 415.

CHAPTER 2

NATIONAL TONE AND OFFICIAL POLICES CONCERNING AFRICAN AMERICAN SOLDIERS (1910-1918)

The Second Civil Rights Struggle for African Americans

The decades leading up to the country's involvement in this European theatre of war saw the utilization of African American Soldiers in positive roles as war fighters. The 9th and 10th Cavalry along with the 24th and 25th Infantry Regiments were recognized as combat multipliers during the Indian Wars against legendary insurgents, such as Geronimo and Victorio. These units also participated in the Spanish American War, the Philippine Insurrection, the pursuit of Pancho Villa, and several Mexican border skirmishes. There actions resulted in numerous accolades and awards to include a total of eighteen Medals of Honor.

The first commissioned African American officers to survive the ostracism and overt racism then condoned at the United States Military Academy joined the Army troop units during this period. There appeared to be a slow and progressive move to maintain trained combat ready African American units within the Army; unfortunately, several instances of self-defense depleted the momentum of these positive developments. Brownsville, Texas, in 1906 saw elements of the 25th Infantry Regiment retaliating with force to counter an abusive situation created by their presence in uniform. President Theodore Roosevelt promptly discharged an entire battalion of Soldiers and blocked them from future government service after investigations proved inconclusive. A similar situation in Houston, Texas, five years later resulted in the 25th Infantry Regiment losing forty-one Soldiers to life sentences and nineteen deaths by hanging due to the deaths of

seventeen Caucasians when one of its battalions reacted to acts of police brutality imposed on a fellow Soldier.

The state of the Union for African Americans during this time was one of exclusion and deprivation. The majority of the African American community was tied to an agrarian economy that functioned mostly as a 20th century form of slavery. Sharecropping was one of the most common forms of sustaining a living for African American families since it was one of the few jobs that did not discriminate in the selection process. In 1910 some 89 percent of the nation's 9,827,763 blacks still lived in the states of the old Confederacy,[1] the great bulk of them in rural areas; and while they were no longer slaves, the great majority were victims of tenant and sharecropping system that left them wholly dependent of the landlord for survival.[2] Unlike the school systems and other industrial and opportunities for employment, *Plessy v. Fergurson's* "Separate but Equal" did not prevent these poor Americans from becoming hedged between such profitless systems of back breaking labor. This policy of separation did in fact prevent the proper equipping and management of African American educational systems across the nation. During the school year of 1911-1912, Southern states spent $2.89 annually to education a black child. Conversely, they spent $10.32 yearly to educate each white child. In 1917, an Atlanta school board discontinued a black seventh grade class to fund a local white school.[3]

Many of the illiterate tenant farmers trapped in fruitless ruts considered service in the United States Army as a route to financial prosperity. The fact that the army was still a proponent of the separate but "unequal" philosophy was accepted as an unfortunate status quo. The military was simply another American institution that subscribed to the

unorthodox quasi-scientific reasoning that hereditary biological attributes determined the subordinate status of blacks and a belief that mutual hostility precluded whites and blacks from cooperating as equals.[4] President Woodrow Wilson upheld these sentiments by ensuring that government employees adhered to discriminatory policies, such as segregation within government offices. This top down philosophy of race relations policies were both embraced and criticized by the army's power elite; however, the majority of leaders embraced it. The housing and training of American troops during the months leading to the nation's debarkation of the American Expeditionary Force, General Leonard Wood was successful in excluding Negroes from the Plattsburg training camp, commenting that he did not even want anyone in the country "with whom our descendants cannot intermarry without producing a breed of mongrels: they must at least be white."[5]

The scope and tone of the army prior to the United States entry into World War I cast a dour view of the potential services which African American troops afforded their fellow Americans. The previous incidents of self-defense by African American combat veterans against the status quo proved to be unnerving. These actions may have played an important role in the limits ascribed to the entry of African American draftees and volunteers into the wartime army of World War I.

Two key assumptions are annotated with these actions. First, there was a great deal of fear or apprehension concerning the training of African Americans. Apartheid conditions during this period favored docile, humble, and conformist African American males. Open declarations of bold and intellectual fortitude were met with violent reactions similar to the hundreds of lynching murders conducted throughout the first two

decades of the twentieth century. The second was that any concessions (concerning improved conditions for African American Soldiers) by the administration at this time would assist in the Civil Rights movement led by such notables as Dr. W. E. B. Dubois, A. Phillip Randolph, and other representatives of the NAACP.

During the decade leading into the Great War, the United States government was stagnant in its efforts to stem the tide of racism directed at the more than 10 million African Americans living within its borders. Jim Crow's yoke was a permanent fixture in the lives of all Americans living in formerly Confederate States with a brutally oppressive system designed to keep African Americans at the lowest levels of political and economic achievement. The shadows of ante-bellum slavery were persistently reflected in the twentieth-century incarnation of sharecropping, a biased agrarian surplus system that exploited African American labor and helped to sustain high illiteracy rates. The prospects of gaining economic and political footing through education were nullified through the prominence of strict segregated practices that offered everything but separate and equal facilities and services for African Americans who resided in these regions. The majority of Americans living during this Apartheid-era of American history were resigned to accept their social and economic positions as the typical status quo. This era essentially offered African Americans little to no protection under the law. Centuries and generations of inaccurate social assessments, anthropological theories, and outright backward thinking had promoted the mythology of the sub-intelligent, subservient, incompetent, yet content African American who like Caucasians readily accepted their role in this particular version of representative democracy. The state, local, and national leaders of this period were also the benefactors of the ugly gifts of ignorance and

prejudice that were the residual effects of prolonged conditions of slavery in the United States. Fortunately, there were several institutions of higher learning that were created and designed to educate the masses of the illiterate and disenfranchised African Americans who were in many cases either slaves or the offspring of slaves. Land grant institutions, colleges that were financed by government grants in order to established state university systems in the south, and more established universities that prohibited the admission of African American students both produced black graduates who contributed to a small but determined pool of professionals scratching out a living in an oppressive environment. It was from these pools that the voices of change for African Americans, who were suppressed at the later end of Reconstruction, started to gain a second wind and resurge. Various organizations were formed and several spectacular African American key figures rose to prominent positions and were nationally associated with the controversial ideology of social, economic, and political equality for blacks in America. Gestures such as publications, conventions, and civil suits became instruments for change in these leaders' strategies to bring recognition and support to their causes. It was a common imperative within most of these progressive organizations for black American improvement that blacks maintain and readily demonstrate staunch support of their country through patriotic commitments, such as military service. This way of thinking was logical in nature since it saw such service as a quantifiable measurement that would undoubtedly justify the inheritance of economic, social, and political equality for blacks. It was during this second age of the struggle for African American civil rights that the country veered down a path toward involvement in the Great War.

Booker T. Washington and William Edward Burghardt Du Bois

There were several recognizable African American leaders during the decade prior to the Great War; however, none received more praise and or vilification than Booker Taliaferro Washington and William Edward Burghardt Du Bois. Booker T. Washington, a former slave who was educated at the Hampton Normal and Industrial Institute in Hampton, Virginia, was a benefactor of the post civil war land grant institution program that was a positive result from the efforts of Reconstruction (Freedmen's Bureau). Upon graduation, he taught at this institution briefly, but eventually he migrated to Tuskegee, Alabama, and founded a different land grant college called the Tuskegee Institute. His ability to garner support from both his own race and many politically and economically powerful and influential whites helped him to reach astounding heights as a renowned civil rights advocate who spoke for the common masses of his people. His eagerness to embrace the terms of accommodationism, a compromising posture that focused on enabling African Americans to gain economic advancement through learning skills and trades within the confines of the existing status quo system of Jim Crow, perpetuated the cycle of disenfranchisement. Washington felt that economic footing would gradually present an opportunity for political traction within the greater American society during this age. Simply put, social and political equality for blacks was not included in his core agenda for civil rights advancement. "In all things that are purely social," he said, "we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress."[6] Washington's approach of labor intensive industrial education over the traditional esoteric traditions of higher learning reinforced the stigma that blacks were only suited for educations that sustained their positions of

service and labor within the nation's workforce. It was mainly this aspect of his philosophy that elicited support from the many white and openly racist industrial giants who frequently provided moral and financial aid in order to satisfy the disenfranchised masses, which they felt were inferior in every way imaginable. This same mission orientation also supplied Washington's civil rights efforts with a plethora of voices that screamed in opposition. His most ardent critic was the voice of one William Edward Burghardt Du Bois.[7]

Unlike Washington, W. E. B. Du Bois was born into a family located in the North (Great Barrington, Massachusetts) which had been free for over a century. He was reared in a family that could be considered African American elite, and earned both a degree at Fisk University in Tennessee and a doctorial degree from Harvard University (the first African American to do so). Like Washington, he too started his career as an educator teaching in the rural backwoods of Tennessee (as mentioned in his 1903 publication, *The Souls of Black Folk*) and later as a professor of history and economics at Atlanta University. His rise to national influence was based on his constant attacks on the Washington ideology of accommodationism. Aside from a chapter in his previously mentioned book entitled, *Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others*, in speaking engagements he rigorously challenged this method of the advancement for African Americans. In July of 1905, Du Bois and almost thirty other influential blacks convened in Niagara Falls to combat the accomodationist philosophy and advocate the eradication of all social institutions that contributed to a caste system that relegated blacks to the lowest rung of the nation's economic, social, and political ladder. Du Bois' views contrasted with Washington's because he believed that economic advancement could

only be reached if social and political rights were guaranteed for African Americans. In the *Souls of Black Folk,* Du Bois recognized Washington as a leader of the black race and marveled at his meteoric rise from slavery to the principalship of Tuskegee Institute. But in Du Bois's eyes, Washington had accepted "the alleged inferiority of the Negro race and withdrawn the demands of Negroes as men and American citizens," an approach that amounted to submission rather than self-assertion.[8] Du Bois felt that a method of educating the top 10 percent of the African American race would be essential to keeping a viable supply of professionals who would be polished and prepared to continue the struggle for the achievement of civil rights for all blacks. Like others who opposed Washington, Du Bois tended to equate agitation and protest with manliness and see them as a virtuous assertion of masculinity. Blacks, he held, must struggle for their rights, and the South should be criticized when criticism was due.[9]Washington's counter argument was that Du Bois' efforts would only benefit a finite number of blacks that would be able to successfully attend institutions of higher learning, and that his methods would alienate those whites who were willing to support the movement with racial agitation. Washington's feud with Du Bois and his open criticism of the Niagara Movement was ultimately the venture's undoing; however, in 1910 Du Bois enthusiastically supported the creation of a successful organization that aggressively pursued his goals of social, political, and economic equality for his fellow African Americans.

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

The NAACP was the culmination of a series of meetings sponsored by a group of white and black progressives, which included the grandson of the famed abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison. Oswald Garrison Villard (W. L. Garrison's grandson) formally

subscribed to Washington's message of accommodation, but he grew increasingly disenchanted at his observations of the continued suffering of African Americans. Washington, as in the Niagara Movement, also abstained and criticized this organization because of its radical motives. This interracial organization for the advancement of blacks survived to become the oldest functioning organization of its kind within the United States. Du Bois' position at the NAACP was that of the director of research and publicity. He primarily contributed as the chief editor of its publication, *The Crisis* Magazine. It was through this medium that Du Bois summarily and routinely voiced his philosophy on racial progression to over 100,000 subscribers by 1919.

The NAACP launched itself into the national foray of injustice in the pursuit of fair treatment for the disenfranchised. Upon the request of Joel Spingarn, a former professor of literature at Columbia University and a close friend of Du Bois, the NAACP soon began to focus many of its efforts toward a legal campaign aimed at toppling Jim Crow laws. Joel Elias Spingarn would eventually rise to the position of Chairman of the NAACP in 1914 and maintain a close affiliation with the organization until his death twenty-five years later. Spingarn was the chairman and chief of the NAACP during the final years leading to the nation's involvement in the Great War. He also held this office throughout the duration of the war. Spingarn's leadership and the widely circulated views of Du Bois did much to influence African American military service in this War to end all Wars.

Closing Ranks

> Du Bois and Spingarn were initially optimistic of the opportunities the war seemingly offered to African Americans. The prospects of openly supporting the nation's needs, a united supporting front from all of its citizens both black and

> white, could potentially yield positive returns in African American socio-political standings. Du Bois issued an editorial entitled "The Black Soldier" in the June issue of *The Crisis* that stated "out of victory for the armies of the Allies would rise an American Negro with the right to vote and the right to work and the right to live without insult. . . . We make no ordinary sacrifice but we make it gladly and willingly with our eyes lifted to the hills." [10] He believed that African Americans needed to put their grievances and complaints concerning their disenfranchisement on hold for the benefits of the country's strategic interests. He mistakenly thought that an earnest effort on the parts of African Americans throughout the nation to put their country's needs before the rights and privileges they so rightly deserved would quicken the pace for acceptance and equal opportunity in the land that their fore fathers helped create. Unfortunately, his willingness to urge all African Americans to "close ranks" with their fellow majority Americans in order to demonstrate a sense of patriotic unity created waves of resentment that plagued him for the rest of his life. But by the summer of 1918, a number of predominant blacks no longer shared Du Bois's enthusiasm for the war or appreciated any longer the efforts of Joel T. Spingarn. . . . An undercurrent of resentment stirred the black populace, a result of the executions of the Houston rioters and the treatment of black draftees were receiving in the wartime Army. Groundless stories circulated that Spingarn, a major in the wartime military service, had joined Du Bois in selling out the black race to the Wilson administration.[11]

"Ultimately, Du Bois himself became disillusioned, principally because of the treatment black troops received overseas. General Pershing's expeditionary headquarters set the tone, advising members of a French military mission how to deal with black Americans."[12] "We must," the members of this mission concluded, "prevent any pronounced degree of intimacy between French officers and black officers. We may be courteous and amiable with these last, but we cannot deal with them on the same plane as the white American officers without deeply wounding the latter." In addition, French officers were to moderate their praise of black troops, especially in the presence of white Americans, and prevent "the local cantonment populations from spoiling the Negroes." Especially to be discouraged were "any public expressions of intimacy" by white women toward black men, a sight that white Americans and French officers who had served in the nation's African colonies found offensive.[13] It was the outright indignities and un-

abashedly biased treatment that were directed at African-American Soldiers through official lines that fueled Du Bois' quest to paint the most accurate picture possible to his hundreds-of-thousands attentive readers. In May 1919, Du Bois published a series of war documents, including letters requesting the removal of Negro officers before they had been tested in battle, orders giving evidence of discriminatory treatment, and a copy of a letter the 92nd Division's chief of staff wrote to a United States senator proposing that never again should a division with Negro officers be organized.[14] His efforts to expose the still rampant racist attitudes that permeated the highest levels of the War Department continued to reveal the futility of selfless sacrifices for the sake of American loyalty in exchange for advancement toward universal equality. His report grew so controversial that the United States Post Office Department refused to accept this issue of his magazine, an action that lent further credibility to the evidence that Du Bois presented.[15]

Even though the efforts the African American community exerted were evidently downplayed by War Department and virtually ignored by the mainstream media, there is no doubt that services were rendered and blood was shed in defense of their country. As the aforementioned advocates vigorously labored for the betterment of these forgotten brothers in arms, there was an even larger contingent of vicious opponents who relished the idea of keeping this noble race of people in their place. These anti-African American processes were persistent, cumulative, and explosive in the years leading up to the United States' entry into the Great War, and nowhere was this more evident than in the great American city of Houston, Texas, in the year of 1917.

Houston, Texas, 23 August 1917

The 3rd Battalion, 24th Infantry, an African American segregated unit under the command of Lieutenant Colonel William Newman, arrived at Houston, Texas, on 29 July 1917. The battalion was stationed at Camp Logan, a newly constructed installation along the main thoroughfare to the town of Houston. As was the standard in most southern cities during this period, Jim Crow practices thrived at every corner of society. Abusive language and behavior were routinely inflicted upon the darker inhabitants of the area. Assaults, insults, and threats were unfortunate realities for the majority of African Americans in the city; however, these very norms energized an innate militancy within the ranks of the 24th Infantry that would catapult a sense of dread, panic, and fear unseen since the exploits of Nat Turner almost a century earlier.

Police brutality has historically been linked to the oppression of blacks during the twentieth century, and it was Police Officer Lee Sparks' actions that resulted in the assault and arrest of Corporal Charles Baltimore, a military policeman of I Company 24th Infantry, on August 23rd. Apparently, Officer Sparks and his partner were enraged at the prospects of losing a fleeing suspect and expended their anguish on Mrs. Sara Travers, a hapless mother of five. "You all God damn nigger bitches. Since these God damn sons of bitches nigger soldiers come here you are trying to take the town. . . . Don't you ask an officer what he want in your house. I'm from Fort Ben(d) and we don't allow niggers to talk back to us. We generally whip them down there."[16] Private Alonzo Edwards, Company L, enquired about the ongoing assault of Mrs. Travers, and was summarily pistol whipped and arrested by Officer Sparks. Sometime later, Corporal Charles Baltimore visited the police station to better understand the circumstances surrounding

Edward's arrest. An exchange was made between Officer Sparks and Corporal Baltimore resulting in Sparks' discharging of his weapon at Baltimore, a running foot pursuit, and the pistol whipping and arrest of Baltimore. It was this incident that proved to be a catalyst of the deadliest proportions in the city of Houston.

Word quickly spread with an exaggeration concerning the death of Corporal Baltimore at the hands of the Houston police department. "It was soon reported in the 24th space Infantry camp that Corporal Baltimore had been shot by an policemen and considerable excitement followed."[17] Major Kneeland S. Snow, a former company commander in the Regiment and the newly installed regimental commander (Lieutenant Colonel William Newman's replacement), proved to be inept in his ability to retain control of his disgruntled troops. His lackadaisical approach to the brewing situation paved the way for an armed contingent of 100 to 150 angry black Soldiers to march into Houston with the intent to take pre-emptive action against a phantom lynch mob preparing to assault Camp Logan. Seventeen civilian and four military deaths later, the city of Houston became the poster child for anti-African American soldiering in the southern states. One hundred fifty-six Soldiers were incarcerated over the incident, and thirteen Soldiers were hung without the benefit of due process. The Army immediately carried out the thirteen executions in the Nesbit court-martial with mass hangings at San Antonio less than two weeks after the sentencing. The abruptness of the disposition, permitted President Wilson no time to review the verdicts, provoked concern and outrage from civil libertarians. The chief executive commuted ten of eleven death sentences mandated in the Tillman case the following year.[18] According to an article in a 1917

edition of *The Crisis* entitled "Houston and East Saint Louis," the following statistics were listed without commentary.

1. Seventeen white persons killed
2. Thirteen colored soldiers hanged
3. Forty-one colored soldiers imprisoned for life
4. Four colored soldiers imprisoned[19]
5. Five colored soldiers under sentenced of death: temporarily reprieved by President
6. Forty colored soldiers on trial for life
7. White policeman who caused the riot not even fined
8. No white army officers tried

This one incident became the central rallying point for the opponents of employing African Americans as combat troops prior to, during, and after the country's involvement in the Great War. It was under the backdrop of this tragic incident, an incident in which the mainstream media squarely laid the blame on the Soldiers of the 24th Infantry without mentioning the conditions that shaped their actions, that the Wilson Administration's policies on the induction of African American Soldiers were augmented. An adjustment that allowed the exploitation, humiliation, and abuse of thousands of African American troops due to serve in the next War.

African American Calls to Service under Jim Crow's Ideology

Dr. Joel E. Spingarn, President of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, charged that the Army General Staff was yielding to the pressure from southern congressmen and arranging to exclude blacks from the World War I draft.[20] As

the prospects for American involvement in a European war grew, African American leaders saw opportunities for their oppressed brethren to prove their mettle in the defense of their solid, but imperfect, model of democracy. Such was the case made in the earlier discussion of W. E. B. Dubois' article "Closing Ranks," Many African Americans continued to be steadfast in the belief that their sacrifices for their nation would yield benefits for the collective body at the cessation of hostilities such as was the case after the wars of the previous two centuries. However, the stark nature of conditional service was fully realized in the reiteration of segregated polices under the Virginian born

African Americans as Commissioned Officers

While W. E. B. Dubois was severely criticized for his earlier attempts to entice the African American community to forget the grievances associated with Jim Crow and close ranks, Dr. Spingarn was equally vilified for his endorsement of the use of segregated training facilities from African Americans. Joel E. Spingarn of the NAACP was equally attacked, especially by the Negro press, for his advocacy of a segregated military training camp for Negro officers and his circular letter urging Negroes to sign up for it.[21] Spingarn ardently defended his position of using segregated camps by citing that African Americans needed to embrace these opportunities to demonstrate their innate qualities of leadership intelligence. The Negro had had few opportunities to demonstrate his competence to lead other men, and few stereotypes bout him were so well established as the belief that he was innately incapable of doing so. If this barrier could be directly and successfully attacked, it would far out weigh the fact that Negroes were trained in segregated camps.[22]

Spingarn also recognized that while the African American Soldier has had an enduring presence in the United States Army over the past several centuries as both an active combatant and logistical enhancement, the proliferation of African American commissioned officers was virtually nonexistent. As early as 19 August 1916, an editorial in the *Defender* stated that "Segregation is something we have striven to abolish: and yet we must insist upon it as the lesser evil."[23] The black press and other African American leaders of prominence saw the merits of flexibility in regards to segregation in order to gain a definitive number of trained and qualified African American commissioned officers. The 24th of May 1917 issue of the Atlanta Independent printed a statement saying, "The government has challenged the Negro race to prove its worth, particularly the worth of its educated leaders. We must succeed and pour into camp in over whelming numbers. Let no man slack." Spingarn's voice and other liberal leaning whites in positions of authority eventually pressured the United States to establish an officer's training facility for potential African American commissioned officers for service. On 17 May, when the president sought Baker's (Secretary of War) aid on how to respond to the various groups asking for a black officer's camp, the White House learned of what Baker decided.[24]

> I was called upon many times by Mr. Waldron and representatives and his committee of one hundred. After considering their requests I came to the conclusion that a training camp for colored people ought to be established. . . . It has now been definitely fixed at Fort Des Moines, Iowa, with full concurrence of the authorities at Howard University. . . . So far as I know, the question is settled wisely from the point of view of the army, and certainly from the point of view of the colored men.[25]

The city of Des Moines, Iowa, was selected to be the approved training location for the training of these officers. It was an ideal location to the War Department because of its

demographic composition. There were only 6,000 blacks living in a city of 110,000 whites; therefore, it was rationalized that racial friction would not be a decisive detractor from accomplishing the task of training such a volume of African American officers. The War Department made an official announcement on 23 May 1917, designating Fort Des Moines, located in Des Moines, Iowa, as the nation's singular training installation for African American military officers.

Fort Des Moines

There were approximately 18,000 regular army and National Guard officers available when the war began, and the American army would select and train nearly 182,000 officers from the civilians entering the military in the next year and a half.[26]

There were 1,200 African American officers included in this final number. Fort Des Moines was to be a counter argument to the criticisms recommending that commissioned officers be generated from the scores of qualified and deserving noncommissioned officers who had distinguished themselves in active service with any of the four existing African American Regiments (24th, 25th, 9th, and the 10th). Other dissenting voices came from other high ranking army officers stuck on the institutional fallacies that painted an inferior picture of African American aptitudes for functioning on higher levels of learning. General Leonard Wood challenged him (Spingarn) to find 200 black college students. By May 1917, the Central Committee of Negro College Men (organized at Howard University) had enrolled 1,500 members.[27] In response to the question of the availability of capable and experienced noncommissioned officers for candidacy to become commissioned officers, a total of 250 noncommissioned officers were selected out of pool of 1,250 able bodied and enthusiastic young African

Americans. The remaining 1,000 candidates were the product of various African American Universities, such as Howard and the Tuskegee Institute. At the conclusion of the program, 639 officers were commissioned (106 Captains, 329 1st Lieutenants, and 204 2nd Lieutenants). The diligent work on behalf of the black press, prominent civil rights proponents, and other influential American's sympathetic to the plight of the African American Soldiers paved the way for installation of over 1,200 officers of African descent to serve in a wartime army of over 200,000 total officers.

Unfortunately, the jubilance of this momentous occasion was marred by the controversy surrounding the designation of the Fort's commanding officer.

Colonel Charles Young

Colonel Charles Young was the third African American graduate of the United States Military Academy at West Point and was the highest ranking African American officer in the Army at that time. Young, who was fifty-three years of age in 1917, had served in the American West, in Haiti, in Liberia, and in Mexico. He had been cited by General Pershing for having done a particularly good job in Mexico;[28] and since he was revered as being a hard but fair commanding officer, he now had expectations of being in charge of Fort Des Moines. He was a seasoned and decorated veteran who had successful led troops under the hazards of combat duty. In 1917, then Lieutenant Colonel Young was a highly charged veteran of the Pancho Villa campaign in Mexico who was anxious to see a newer generation of African American officers join the fold of his chosen career. Since his graduation from West Point in 1889, there had not been a single African American graduate from this institution.

Initially Lieutenant Colonel Young was the logical choice by the war department to train and become an established leader within one of the all African American divisions due to benefit from such an influx of African American officers. This realization also presented a problem to the army since theoretically a successful tour as a Colonel level command would make him a prime candidate for promotion to general officer. The standing orders of the Jim Crow era did not allow African American officers to have white Soldiers under their command. Wilson, who unlike his rather moderate leaning Secretary of War, maintained a conservative segregationist throughout this particular period in American history. He essentially allowed one of the army's most talented, competent, and battle tested senior officers to be summarily retired on the eve of his most influential leadership position to date.

A white officer of the 10th Cavalry, First Lieutenant Albert S. Dockery, had complained that as a southerner, he found it distasteful to take orders from a black superior. Alerted to Dockery's plight by Senator John Bell Williams of Mississippi, the President promptly sided with the junior officer, suggesting that the Secretary of War transfer the Lieutenant to a white regiment.[29] At first, Baker felt that the Lieutenant had no other recourse but to resign his commission and leave the army; however, with further objections from other junior officers via their congressional representatives, the President overrode the intentions of Baker and allowed the Army to force Lieutenant Colonel Young into retirement using a claim of high blood pressure ailment as the official reason. He was placed on the retired inactive list, and as a response to its obvious miscarriage of justice, he made a 500 mile trek on horseback from his home in Xenia, Ohio, to Washington, DC. This feat was captured by both the black press and the mainstream

media outlets of the period; unfortunately, it was not enough to convince the War Department that he was fully capable for duty in Europe.

Ironically, five days from the signing of the Armistice, Lieutenant Colonel Young was promoted to Colonel and recalled to serve as a military adviser to the adjutant general of the State of Ohio. He later went on to serve as a military attaché in Liberia and Nigeria, encountered a bout with tropical fever, and passed away on the continent of his ancestors. In his career, he had trained black troops for combat and led them in action, but the fear that he might command whites prevented him from wearing the stars of a brigadier general or contributing to the victory in the World War.[30]

Colonel Charles C. Ballou

Lieutenant Colonel Charles C. Ballou of the 24th Infantry, a West Point classmate of General Pershing, assumed the vacancy created by the disgraceful actions of the Wilson administration when it prevented the more qualified senior officer, Lieutenant Colonel Charles Young, from presiding over this promising group of motivated warriors. To many in the country, this attempt to create a functional pool of African American officers was simply a political action to placate the demands for equality from the dominant civil rights activist and liberal leaning bodies. However, to the rest of the nation, especially the over nine million African Americans representing roughly one-tenth of the country, this was a step in the right direction toward a true representative democracy. With these polarizing sentiments, Lieutenant Colonel Ballou took hold of the reins in Des Moines, Iowa, with an optimistic vision. He then went on to observe that most of the candidates were remarkably strong, earnest, well educated, and well-behaved men. Their training was on schedule and was being absorbed without severe strain, and

their appearance at drill, on guard, and in battalion and regimental parades had been most creditable.[31]

Colonel Ballou's interpretations soon began to progressively sour as he started to voice doubts concerning the mental potential of the candidates. As his optimism dampened, he began to associate the majority of the candidates with the expectations of quality noncommission officers and mediocrity as officers at best. He offered recommendations that followed along the same racist unofficial policy that African American officers were not mentally developed enough to discharge the duties required of the Field Artillery branch or the Corps of Engineers. He reported that it would be best to prepare all of the expectant junior officers to lead Soldiers within infantry units. Since this branch was the least technically challenging of the then existing combat arms components. His clouded observations continued to feed into the mythology embraced by the War Department that African American combat Soldiers made poor officers, and throughout the rest of his association with African American units as an officer during the Great War, he continued to malign and discredit the efforts of African American officers.

African American Enlisted Soldiers Meeting the Call

Many of the actions that originated from the War Department during the years of the Great War era were rife with the condemnation and insensitivity of a racially discriminatory society; however, Secretary Baker did make one positive decision of African American inclusion. He appointed an Assistant Secretary of War to be a conduit between his policies and the African American population. Emmett J. Scott, an African American intellectual who was a close disciple of Booker T. Washington, was selected to be Baker's deputy. His appointment was generally considered to be a type of political

concession and his influence on Baker was minimal; however, his voice was still present at this level of policy making. At the beginning of the war, the regular army of professional Soldiers could call on roughly 127,588 troops (including 10,000 African Americans) and 164,292 National Guard Officers and enlisted men (10,000 of them black) serving in state governments.[32] It was reported by the Office of the Provost Marshal General, that by November 1918, almost 3.9 million were inducted into the army. Surprisingly, over 70 percent of this number gained entry into the army through conscription. Since the draft was responsible for the majority of troops put into an army uniform, the majority of African Americans who entered the army during this period were at the mercy of the prejudices and discriminatory inclinations of their local draft boards.

In 1917, the first round of conscription (as per President Wilson's signatory Selective Service Act) was oddly disproportionate in terms of African Americans and whites. African Americans represented 9 percent of the total American draft registrants, and made up 13 percent of the total number of draftees. Blacks were approved for immediate induction at a rate of 57 percent while Whites only achieved 32.5 percent of the same status.[33] Due to the fact that over 89 percent of all African Americans lived under Jim Crow institutionalized local and state governments, the majority of draft boards were usually unsympathetic to reasonable requests for exemption from blacks. Requirements to remain with their families in order to provide support were usually deemed sufficient for white deferments, but were ignored for African Americans. In parts of the South, Black sharecroppers were not drafted if the planters on whose land they worked filed requests for their exemption, whereas independent black farmers with large

families were arbitrarily drafted.[34] There were also economic justifications recorded. Some local boards correctly noted that the $30 a month that a black serviceman received as his military pay, often supplement by family allotments of $15 to $50 through War Risk Insurance plans, exceeded the wages received by most black laborers and farmers in the southern states.[35] There was also the question of literacy rates and ignorance of the selective service process. It is possible that fewer blacks applied for exemptions because the process required literacy and detailed understanding of one's rights under the selective service regulations.[36]

In contrast to the conscription of African American Soldiers, the numbers of blacks voluntarily enlisting was severely curtailed. *The National Defense Act* of June 1916 authorized the regular army to absorb 100 percent strength capacities; however, for the segregated army this meant only four regiments for the African American (9th and 10th Cavalry and the 24th and 25th Infantry). The resulting policy limited blacks to only 4,000 enlisted positions (20,000 total available) as opposed to over 650,000 opened to whites. Consequently, just over 96 percent (367,710) of the nearly 380,000 African Americans who served were conscripted.[37]

At the start of the war, it was generally assumed that the army would induct African American Soldiers to complete tasks in the same manner as they had done in all of the nation's previous wars, as combat Soldiers. The first mobilization plan accepted by the General Staff on 31 July 1917, suggested training the majority of black draftees for combat. This plan would have placed an equal number of black troops in each camp across the nation, and created company grade positions for the black candidates currently

attending the Fort Des Moines Colored Officers' Training Camp.[38] Unfortunately, these expectations were short lived.

> Since when has the subject race come out of a war with its rights and privileges accorded for such participation? . . . Did not the Negro fight in the Revolutionary War, with Crispus Attucks dying first . . . and come out to be a miserable chattel slave in this country for nearly one hundred yeas after? . . . Did not the Negro take part in the Spanish-American War? . . . And have not prejudice and race hate grown in this country since 1898?[39]

Southern political pressures, as was the case with the untimely retirement of Lieutenant Colonel Young, were instrumental is dictating Wilson's policy regarding the positions and roles of African American troops. The mainstream constituents below the Mason-Dixon Line were wary of the arming and training of young, disciplined, and well maintained black men. Examples of racial violence in Texas, due to African American Soldiers retaliating to inhumane treatment and routine indignities allowed under Jim Crow, made policy makers voice strong opinions on how many blacks should receive such combat training. In response to such fears, Du Bois commented "It is not so much that they fear that the Negro will strike if he gets a chance, but rather that they assume with curious unanimity that he has reason to strike, that any other persons in his circumstances or treated as he is would rebel."[40] These concerns prompted the War Department to place a limit of only 42,000 African American Soldiers serving out of almost 380,000 total forces earning wages as combat arms professionals. Major General Tasker H. Bliss, then the Acting Army Chief of Staff, forwarded his solution to the concerns of southern congressmen.

> The sixth and last, and in the opinion of the (General Staff) committee, the preferable plan with respect to the object of preventing racial troubles is to suspend for a little while the call for the colored draft: to call these men out as they are required for service with the Quartermaster Corps (or) Engineers . . .

> organizing and giving preliminary instruction in the localities where raised: and shipping them abroad as rapidly as possible.
>
> Plan VI it is believed to be the best. The regiments organized for the service mentioned in this plan (for which also many white regiments must be organized) calls for the minimum of training under arms. In fact this part of the training can be deferred until these troops arrive in France. It will result in getting the colored draft abroad more quickly than any other plan: and when once abroad, we do not apprehend trouble arising from racial differences. Experience has shown that when troops are once in the field, these differences disappear.[41]

Baker accepted his recommendation and immediately put it into effect. The overwhelming majority, regardless of their qualifications were assigned to noncombat service in labor and stevedore battalions. As a rule, no attempt was made to provide service troops with military training. Further, these troops were housed in inferior quarters, without either recreational facilities or proper medical attention.[42]

Draft boards and southern fears were definite catalysts in the assigning of most black Soldiers to service oriented positions, but there were other factors that weighed in too. Pseudo-scientific racism and what are now recognized as culturally biased tests used to determine the intelligence of service members, proved to be woefully inadequate. Dr. Jennifer D. Keene's 1994 book, *Intelligence and Morale in the Army of a Democracy: The Genesis of Military Psychology during the First World War*, states

> Now-classic examples of the cultural bias inherent in these early exams include a question on the beta exam for illiterate recruits that pictured an empty tennis court and expected the soldier to draw a net to complete the portrait and questions on the alpha exam for literate soldiers that tested soldiers' familiarity with brand--name products.[43]

Further scrutiny of these exams demonstrated that instead of quantifying intelligence, the simply determined literacy rates. The majority of African Americans Soldiers were born, raised, and educated in segregated school systems that operated under the facade of being "Separate but Equal" in terms of white educational standards. Naturally, this explained

the nearly 50 percent illiteracy rate in African American recruits as opposed to approximately a 22 percent illiteracy rate in whites.[44] These inaccurate assessments of black mental aptitude, and the shameful neglect of the recruits medical needs (illnesses exacerbated by substandard housing and the lack of seasonal clothing), were also used to add substance to the lie that African American men lack the physical constitution and intellectual ability to function as war fighters during combat situation. It was as if the centuries of heroics by African American combat Soldiers in all preceding American conflicts ceased to exist.

The nation's negative tone and official policies that forced African Americans to survive in the pinnacle of democracy as conditional citizens were just as prevalent in the establishment of the American Expeditionary Force. The African American Soldier was essentially engaged with an enemy on two separate fronts. The first opponent was the ingrained bigotry of Jim Crow, an anomaly that mutated from the Black Codes of post Reconstruction, and the other was his potential adversary in Europe. Blacks silently endured economic disenfranchisement, such as sharecropping, lynchings, and poor educational support; however, they achieved a disproportionate percentage in service to a country that offered only scraps of humanity. This was the state of black America in the earliest phases of the World War I. The following chapter will delve into the latter half of their preparation for deployment (formation, training, unit designation) and their actions as combatants against a battle tested adversary.

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[1]U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Negro Population in the United States, 1790-1915* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1918), 33.

[2]Patton, 17.

[3]Salter, 99-100.

[4]Mershon and Scholossman, 13.

[5]Wood to Theodore Roosevelt, 5 March 1915, in *Social Attitudes of American Generals,* ed. Richard Carl Brown (Washington, DC: Ayer Publishing, 1979), 186.

[6]Booker T. Washington, *Up From Slavery* (New York: Doubleday, 1902), 221-22.

[7]W. E. B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York, NY: Barnes and Nobles Classic, 2003), 68.

[8]Ibid., 48.

[9]Patton, 22.

[10]Jack D. Foner, *Blacks and the Military in American History: A New Perspective* (New York, NY: Praeger Publishers, 1974), 109.

[11]William B. White, "The Military and the Melting Pot: The American Army and Minority Groups" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1968), 291.

[12]Bernard C. Nalty, *Strength for the Fight: A History of Black Americans in the Military* (New York, NY: Collier Macmillan Publishers, 1986), 114.

[13]Colonel Louis Albert Linard, AEF French Liaison Officer, "Secret Information Concerning Black American Troops," *The Crisis* (May 1919): 16-17.

[14]Lee, 11.

[15]Benard C. Nalty and Morris J. MacGregor, *Blacks in the Military: Essential Documents* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1981), .88.

[16]Garna L. Christian, *Black Soldiers in Jim Crow Texas, 1899-1917* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1995), 151.

[17]Nalty and MacGregor, 69.

[18]*Houston Chronicle*, 2 December 1917; and *San Antonio Light*, 7 December 1975. *U.S. v. Nesvit: U.S. v. Tillman*. The condemned men requested death by firing squad, but the army considered them unworthy. Every account had them dying courageously, while maintaining their innocence.

[19]Christian, 150.

[20]Nalty and MacGregor, 75.

[21]Joel E. Spingarn Collection, *Military Training Camp for Colored Men: An Open Letter from Dr. J.E. Spingarn to the Educated Colored Men of the U.S* (Washington, DC: Moorland Spingarn Research Center, 15 February 1917)

[22]White, 284.

[23]Editorials in the *Bee*, "Rally to the Flag," 31 March 1917; and the Iowa *Bystander,* 15 June 1917. Both editorials support the concept of a separate camp and endorse black participation in the war effort.

[24]Gerald W. Patton, *War and Race: The Black Officer in the American Military, 1915-1941* (London: Greenwood Press, 1981), 43.

[25]Ibid.

[26]Edward Coffman, *The War to End All Wars: The American Military Experience in World War I* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1968), 55-58.

[27]Gail Buckley, *American Patriots: The Story of Blacks in the Military from the Revolution to Desert Storm* (New York, NY: Random House, 2001), 177.

[28]Herbert Aptheker, *The Correspondence of W. E. B. Du Bois,* vol. 1 (Baltimore, MD: University of Massachusetts Press, 1973), 221.

[29]Nalty, 110.

[30]Foner, 18.

[31]Patton, 57.

[32]Jennifer D. Keene, "A Comparative Study of White and Black American Soldiers During the First World War," *Annales De Demographie Historique*, no. 1 (2002): 71.

[33]Arthur Barbeau and Henri Florette, *The Unknown Soldiers: African American Troops in Word l War I* (New York, NY: Da Capo Press, 1996), 36.

[34]Foner, 112.

[35]John W. Chambers, *To Raise an Army: The Draft Comes to Modern American* (New York, NY: Free Press, 1987), 347.

[36]Keene, 72.

[37]Ibid., 73.

[38]Major General Tasker H. Bliss, Memorandum for Secretary of War, Newton D. Baker, 31 July 1917, Washington, DC: Military Archives Division, National Archives.

[39]Foner, 110.

[40]W. E. B. DuBois, "Darkwater," in *Oxford W. E. B. Du Bois Reader*, ed. Eric J. Sundquist (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 602.

[41]Memorandum, Major General Tasker H. Bliss for Secretary of War Newton D. Baker, 24 August 1917, Washington, DC: Military Archives Division, National Archives.

[42]Foner, 119.

[43]Keene, 77.

[44]Ibid.

CHAPTER 3

AFRICAN AMERICAN SOLDIERS IN THE GREAT WAR

The Organization of African American Soldiers in the Great War

The president's permissive position in regards to segregation permeated even the civil servant ranks at the nation's capital, so it was not unexpected when he readily agreed to the War Department's strict enforcement of separating African American Soldiers from their Caucasian counterparts. This separation was under unequal circumstances. It was widely believed that the 92nd Division was established by Secretary of War, Newton D. Baker, and approved by President Woodrow Wilson over the objections of the Army's General Staff. Before they left the country for France, there were rumors that the division had not been given properly selected men and that there were deficiencies in the technical training of both officers and enlisted men.[1] "Deficiencies in literate and skilled men might have been remedied by transfers of men from other regiments, but, *The Crisis* informed its readers, permission to make these transfers had been denied. Unless this decision is reversed, the magazine predicted, the Ninety-second Division is bound to be a failure as a unit organization."[2] The 92nd Infantry Division's predicament is an excellent example of how training deficiencies in both leadership and core combat competencies at all levels partially contributed to disappointing performances during the conduct of war in Europe. Unfortunately, these mistakes, which were also prevalent in mainstream American Expeditionary Forces, were uniformly applied as negative labels to discredit the 92nd Division and its Soldiers.

The same sense of abandonment was relayed to the 93rd Division in regards to there war time preparation. The 93rd Division was a severely restricted division that included roughly one-third of what an American infantry division was authorized. The division's strength amounted to only four infantry regiments and was deployed with minimal training and equipment. Components of the 93rd Infantry Division were transferred to the French military command to serve as needed. This maneuver met the French demands for the American Expeditionary Forces to provide additional combatants. The caveat was that the French would have to sustain their logistical and deep fires requirements. Unlike the 92nd Division, the 93rd's accomplishments of valor and distinction were duly recognized, recorded, and honored by a truly grateful foreign command. While the backgrounds and origins of both the 92nd and 93rd Infantry Divisions were similar, the perceptions of their professionalism and effectiveness varied greatly across the American Expeditionary Forces Command.

There were over 389,000 African American Soldiers associated with the army during the Great War, with only 42,000 assigned to combat related duties. The remaining African American Soldiers (approximately 162,000 deployed to France) were placed in labor intensive units "as a consequence of racially motivated policies designed to keep black Soldiers in the rear unloading boxes instead of manning the trenches along the front"[3] Overall, African Americans made up approximately one-third of the wartime army's laboring units and one-thirtieth of its combat forces.[4] Considering the logistical requirements needed to maintain the American Expeditionary Force, the accomplishments of service and support units were essential to the victories earned at the front. Given the American tradition of segregation and its inherent proclivity to limit

African American males to service industries in the United States, it was possibly considered logical to make these duties African American dominant. The following memorandum from Major General Bliss to the Secretary of War, Newton D. Baker, illustrates the intent of the army to divert the majority of African American Soldiers into service and support units in lieu of combat organizations.

> VI. The sixth and last, and in the opinion of the [General Staff] committee, the preferable plan with respect to the object of preventing racial trouble is to suspend for a little while the call for the colored draft; to call these men out as they are required for service with the Quartermaster Corps [or] Engineers . . . organizing and giving preliminary instruction in the localities where raised; and shipping them abroad as rapidly as possible.
>
> General Pershing has been urgently calling for troops of this character as being absolutely necessary in connection with the service of the ports of debarkation In France, along the railway lines of communication, at the great depots of supplies for service as forestry regiments etc. We required now some 46 service battalions of engineers or a total of 46,276 enlisted men. We required 46 service companies of 250 men each, or a total of 10,000 [11,500] men. We required a large number of forestry regiments and railroad construction regiments. In fact we already require more regiments organized for this sort of service than the entire colored draft will provide for. White regiments have been and are being organized for this same service.
>
> Comments
>
> Plan VI is believed to be the best. The regiments organized for the service mentioned in this plan (for which also many white regiments must be organized) calls for the minimum of training under arms. In fact this part of the training can be deferred until these troops arrive at France. It will result in getting the colored draft abroad more quickly than any other plan: and when once abroad, we do not apprehend trouble arising from racial differences. Experience has shown that when troops are once in the field, these differences disappear.[5]

The efforts of General Bliss to divert the majority of African American man power to the service and support specialties within the army were very successful. Jennifer Keene observed that over 89 percent of all black troops would serve in assorted labor battalions, pioneer infantry units, salvage companies, and stevedore organizations.[6] Booker T. Washington's philosophy concerning accomodationalism probably has made a larger impression on the fielding of these types of units than has been historically realized in

considering the sources used for this research project. However, it was W. E. B. Du Bois' anti-accomodationalist's attitude and his supporters and sympathizers that helped to procure a spot under the lights for combat troops and commissioned officers.

At the start of the drafting period, there were four seasoned and battle tested African American regiments already on active duty; however, the War Department's actions ensured that the 9th Cavalry, the 10th Cavalry, the 24th Infantry, and the 25th Infantry never reached the shores of Europe as combat multipliers during this conflict. Surely, the best trained and most combat- ready African American Soldiers were the men of these regiments. However, as previously shown, these units were selected to remain on duty in the Pacific and along the United States-Mexican border. The War Department, however, did not completely overlook the four regiments. The first sergeants and senior noncommissioned officers in the newly formed labor units were selected from "suitable enlisted men . . . from the . . . regular Army."[7] Approximately 250 noncommissioned officers from all four of these combat regiments were selected to attend Officer Training School at Fort Des Moines, Iowa, in an attempt to create experienced African American officers.[8]

African American mobilization, especially the formation of combat focused units, was a point of contention for much of the southern United States. However, the efforts of pro-African American activists, such as Joel Spingarn and W. E. B. Du Bois, helped to get combat divisions established in spite of their opposition. There have been many recorded instances of African American willingness to serve in support of this war. Approximately 2,291,000 black men registered for the draft, and by the time the war ended, 367,710 had been inducted into the armed forces, representing a 34.1 percent rate

of acceptance as opposed to 24.04 percent for whites.[9] General Bliss's recommendations on dealing with African American combat units were noted in the following statement.

> I recommend that it be announced that after their preliminary training has been sufficiently completed we will form a combatant division of colored troops. The component parts of this division will remain in their respective cantonments until the time comes to prepare the division to go abroad. They can then be assembled at some National Guard camp, which by that time will have been abandoned. By that time officers will know their men, the troops will have become accustomed to their officers, and should be fairly well disciplined.[10]

The formation of the 92nd Infantry Division was a direct result. The "best" 26,000 African American draftees were selected to form the 92nd Division, and unlike the 93rd Division (Provisional), the 92nd Division was organized and brought to full strength.[11] The 92nd was comprised of four infantry regiments: the 365th, 366th, 367th, and 368th. The 349th, 350th, and 351st were the division's three field artillery regiments. The division also included the 317th Engineer Battalion; the 325th Signal Battalion; the 349th, 350th, and 351st Machine Gun Battalions; the 316th Laundry Service Company; the 317th Trench-Mortar Battery; the 322nd Butchery Service Company; and various other small specialty units.[12] Like the 93rd Division, the regiments of the 92nd and several of the specialty units were trained at separate location in the United States, only to be brought together as a complete division once in France.[13] None of the other mainstream combat divisions within the United States Army were subjected to this type of indoctrination. W. E. B. Dubois noted in the May 1918 issue of *The Crisis* the following observations in his appraisal of the 92nd Division's preparation for war:

> Again, the 92nd Division of Negro troops was established by the Secretary of War and approved by President Wilson over the protest of the General Staff; but no effort was made to secure for this division certain necessary persons of technical training. . . . The permission to make such transfers has been denied by the War Department. Unless this decision is reversed; the Ninety-Second Division is

> bound to be a failure as a unit organization. Is it possible that persons in the War Department wish this division to be a failure?[14]

Their stories and the factors that influenced these perceptions will be examined later in this chapter. An exploration of their training and the limitations African American Soldiers were forced to endure will be detailed in the following section.

African American Soldiers Training For the Fight

The training of black combat units proved at best uneven.[15] The Army's senior leadership at this time felt that African American combat troops would not make a significant impact during the American Expeditionary Campaign since their numbers represented only 3 percent of the army's total combat strength. Unfortunately, these oversights led to extreme hardships on the hearts, minds, and bodies of thousands of draftees and voluntary African American Soldiers who willingly answered their nation's call to arms. There were numerous camps erected for the purposes of training African American Soldiers in response to the over 400,000 troopers who were processed due to the *Selective Service Act*. Troops were housed in inferior quarters, without either recreational facilities or proper medical attention. Housing and uniform shortage for draftees were common throughout the army, but African American needs were the lowest in priority. They lived in tents without floors and stoves, and in some cases they were given discarded uniforms, which arrived in crates specifically marked "for colored draft."[16] Recruits were subjected to varied degrees of discrimination and neglect from certain training facilities to other installations; however, none were more heinous than the reported treatment identified at Camp Lee, Virginia, in the winter of 1917.

According to E. J. Scott's, *The American Negro in the World War*, "At Camp Lee there was much dissatisfaction among the colored Soldiers. The reports which came to hand embodied the universal complaint that the whole atmosphere in regard to the colored Soldier at Camp Lee is one which does not inspire him to greater patriotism, but rather makes him question the sincerity of the Great War principles of America."[17] Mr. C. H. Williams, of the Hampton Institute, Virginia, a young colored man of superior training, was designated by the Committee on Welfare of Negro Troops of the War Time Commission of the Federal Council of Churches to visit all the cities where military camps were located to make a survey of conditions as they affected colored troops. Under an arrangement, he filed with the Special Assistant to the Secretary of War (Emmett J. Scott) a copy of each of his reports, so that they might be followed up from time to time inside of the War Department so as to change conditions where necessary. Mr. Williams sought to get the exact facts as to the feeling of the colored Soldiers as well as of the colored population in the camp cities, and as he went from one part of the country to the other, he also got a line on Negro public opinion generally. The Special Assistant and Williams visited practically all the camps and cantonments where colored troops were located.[18] Mr. William's investigation into the Camp Lee allegations generated the following detailed findings.

<u>Complaints Lodged by Colored Soldiers in Camp</u>

Discrimination as to the issuance of passes to leave the camps--that white soldiers were allowed to go at will, while Negroes were refused permission to leave.

Unfair treatment, of times brutality, on the part of Military Police.

Inadequate provision for recreation.

Unfair treatment, of times brutality, on the part of Military Police. and denial of the enjoyment of privileges in the huts, where colored huts had not been provided.

White non-commissioned officers over colored units, when the colored men were of a higher intellectual plane than the whites who commanded them.

Lack of opportunity for educated Negroes to rise above non-commissioned officers in the Reserve Labor Battalions.

Confinement to the guard house for long periods and compelled to pay heavy penalties for minor infractions of the rules of camp, or for disobedience of unreasonable commands.

Frequently, lack of proper medical attention and treatment.

Negro soldiers compelled to work at menial tasks, and denied sufficient drill work and not allowed training in manual of arms and denied an opportunity to fire a gun, in many instances.

Insufficient number of Hostess Houses---especially in the earlier stages of the war. Insufficient number of chaplains in most camps, in earlier stages of the war. Never enough of either of these helpful agencies at any stage of the war.

Slow discharge of colored men in labor battalions after the armistice.

At more than one camp---Humphreys notably---colored men had practically no sanitary conveniences, bathing facilities, barracks, mess halls, Y. M. C. A. service, during the war period., until after white soldiers had left the station.

Use of abusive language to the colored soldiers by white officers and calling them by opprobrious names.

Working with civilians, soldiers getting $30 per month, and the civilian, doing identical work, getting from $3.50 to $5.00 per diem.

Too many tent camps for Negroes, while whites are given barracks.

Reluctance of white officers to recommend colored men for induction into the Officers' Training Camps.

Men with venereal diseases not segregated in the matter of washing mess kits and general use of camp facilities from those not so infected.

During winter of 1917-18, general complaint was made of insufficient clothing, shortage in supply of overcoats, inadequate bedding, and tents without flooring and of times situated in wet places, where ice formed in winter and where mud and malaria flourished at other times. A statement came from Camp Alexander,

> Va., that during the winter of 1917-18 men died like sheep in their tents, it being a common occurrence to go around in the morning and drag men out frozen to death. It took a long time for this situation to get to the authorities, but when it did get to the proper officials; steps were taken to correct the trouble.
>
> Men pronounced unfit for overseas service, and often in cases where they were unfit for any kind of military duty, were kept at the camps and forced to work.
>
> Alleged essential labor required at many stations on Sundays.
>
> Made to work in rain and cursed when any dissatisfaction was shown. 'Gotten even with' by commanders if report was made of conditions to higher officers or to outsiders.
>
> Promise of officials to muster out first the men in tent camps not promptly kept"Passes refused colored men, even when messages of critical illness of parents or near relatives had been received.[19]

The African American Press and Civil Rights Organizations, such as the NAACP, responded to these types of complaints with tenacity and fervor. Churches and other organizations joined in sending resolutions of protest to Secretary of War Baker. A group of black editors called for an end to Jim Crow travel restrictions, the suppression of lynching, and acceptance of the negro as a full partner in the war effort in short, "acceptance of help where help is needed regardless of the color of the helper."[20] Unfortunately, it was a case of too little to late in changing of conditions associated with Camp Lee's inhospitable environment.

As a caveat to the inferior training conditions offered to African American recruits, the surrounding towns near the training camps did little to accommodate the needs of these Soldiers. Life for the black Soldiers outside the camps was also characterized by mistreatment and insults from white civilians and local police, especially in the South.[21] The recent case of vigilante styled justice performed by units under the 24th Infantry Regiment in Houston, Texas, was unintentionally a successful employment

of information operations against the psyche of the mainstream American public. The thought of well trained and cohesive able-bodied African American Soldiers armed throughout training facilities in the South fanned fears in the hearts of many die-hard segregationists. It would seem that these sentiments could easily be taken for collective guilt that convicted the rampant white-supremacist ideology that permeated the southern states; however, be that as it may, the status quo demanded that African Americans be constantly reminded of their place in this ante-bellum generated caste system. The turn-of-the-century resurgence of racial hostility and discrimination had the unmistakable effect of increasing whites' suspicion of black Soldiers and reducing public commitment to enforcing even the "separate but equal" standard in the Army.[22] The paradoxical situation of training disenfranchised American citizens to deploy to a foreign land in the name of American freedom as liberators of an oppressed populace fell on deaf ears as far as the War Department was concerned. General officers discharged with the missions to train, deploy, and fight with these African American Soldiers did little to change the racist nature of the status quo in the communities that bordered their training camps. Bernard Nalty's work, *Strength for the Fight*, identified an incident concerning an African American Soldier's receipt of discriminatory actions at the hands of both a local merchant and his commanding general. "In the spring of 1918, when one of his black sergeants was refused admittance to a civilian-run theater and responded with angry words, Ballou (Commanding General 92nd ID) issued a bulletin that placed blame for the incident not on the theater manager, but on the victim of the Jim Crow practices." Ballou felt "the row should never have occurred and would not have occurred had the sergeant placed the general good above his personal pleasure and convenience."[23] As with the

preponderance of the army's senior leadership, it was mostly expected that the African American troops make preparations to defend the colors of his country while tasting bitterness from the fruits of denial, exclusion, and unequal treatment. He urged his men to "lace the general interest of the Division above the personal pride and gratification," to avoid, "every situation that can give rise to racial ill-will," to attend "quietly and faithfully to your duties," and to avoid those places "where your presence is not desired."[24]

92nd Infantry Division Bulletin No. 35, 28 March 1918

> 2. To avoid such [racial] conflicts the division commander has repeated urged that all colored members of his command, and especially the officers and noncommissioned officers, should refrain from going where their presence will be resented. In spite of this injunction, one of the sergeants of the Medical Department has recently precipitated the precise trouble that should be avoided, and then called upon the division commander to take sides in a row that should never have occurred, and would not have occurred had that the sergeant placed the general good above his personal pleasure and convenience. The sergeant entered a theater, as he undoubtedly had a legal right to do, and precipitated trouble by making it possible to allege race discrimination in the seat he was given. He was strictly within his legal rights in this matter, and the theater manager is legally wrong. Nevertheless the sergeant is guilty of the greater wrong in doing anything, no matter how legally correct that will provoke race animosity.
>
> 3. The division commander repeats that the success of the division, with all that success implies, is dependent upon the goodwill of the public. That public is nine-tenths white. White men made the division, and they can break it just as easily if it becomes a troublemaker.
>
> 4. All concerned are enjoined to place the general interest of the division above personal pride and gratification. Avoid every situation that can give rise to racial ill will. Attend quietly and faithfully to your duties, and don't go where your presence is not desired.
>
> 5. It is expected that a local military police detachment will be stationed in every town billeted by organizations of this division, this force will be augmented by the necessary details from the military police of this division so that there will be sufficient force in each town to maintain the strictest order and discipline at all times, day and night. In addition, the commanding officer of each town will

employ the necessary sentinels to prevent men from leaving the town in which billeted without written permission. The especial duties with which the military police and sentinels are charged are:

a. To ensure order and proper behavior by enlisted men at all times

b. To prevent them from loitering on streets and congregating in groups.

c. To enforce proper dress and saluting by enlisted men.

d. To prevent enlisted men from leaving the town this billeted without permission.

e. To prevent enlisted men from addressing or holding conversation with the women inhabitants of the town.

f. To prevent enlisted men entering any building other than their respective billets with the exception of stores, places of amusement and cafes.

6. The commanding officer of each town in which troops are billeted will station a military police or n.c. [non-commissioned] officer in each café whenever they are opened for trade with enlisted men to enforce order at all time and ensure compliance with orders relative to the sale of liquor, etc. No enlisted man will be allowed in any room of the building except the café. In the event of misbehavior in any café in any town, the commanding officer will at once close all cafes in the town to soldiers, and will keep them so closed until the conduct of every man of his command is guarantee of future good order. This is punishing the many for the sins of the few but is a necessary measure until the many will assist the authorities in getting rid of the few who are a menace to the public and the good name and reputation.[25]

Major General Ballou's actions relayed an attitude that reinforced Caucasian dominance in all aspects of African American military service. The second and third order effects of these sentiments lessened the morale and damaged the linkage between his Soldiers and their commissioned, Caucasian dominant leadership. These distances manifested negative returns during both training and combat on many levels. While it has been proven that the actions of the 92nd Division were no more filled with cowardice or duty dereliction than the average mainstream division, it was this breech of trust between the leaders and the lead that fostered myth of the division's ineptitude in the conduct of

combat missions. The attitudes and fears of the post "Houston-24th Infantry Regiment's? Riot" helped to shape the War Department's policy of monitoring and curtailing the few liberties African American troops were afforded between training periods. However, the policies enacted to limit African American Soldiers' free time in Europe were not as easily rationalized.

Centuries of accepting a subservient role within a "free" society had been the inheritance of the more than 250,000 African American Soldiers who were granted the opportunity to travel to Europe as part of the American Expeditionary Force. The majorities of these Soldiers was sons of the southern portion of the United States, and were on average only one or two generations removed from the yoke of chattel slavery. They were mostly functionally illiterate and ignorant due to the benefits of separate but equal policies enforced during this period. The deployed African American Soldier, on average, had yet to receive impartial treatment in a Caucasian dominated society at any point in his life. Therefore, the potential for a newfound sense of self-worth garnered through the experience of real freedom was considered a threat to the American status-quo of separate but "unequal" thinking. "The Negroes will come back feeling like men, and not disposed to accept the treatment to which they have been subjected."[26] These latest fears, the African American Soldiers' realization that the American status-quo was not necessarily a global tradition, influenced War Department leaders (at all levels) to nullify these effects by whatever means they felt appropriate. Honorable services rendered by the African American Soldiers on European soil were more often than not the target of smear campaigns and the depreciation of their sacrifices.

The most efficient method of preventing the African American Soldiers from experiencing the basic courtesies that the French public was willing to extend was to drive a wedge between the oppressed and their liberators of a darker hue. In the August 1918 issue of the *Crisis*, W. E. B. Du Bois collected and published several documents that revealed the tactics taken by the American Expeditionary Force during the Great War to separate the African American Soldier from the grateful French citizenry. The intent of his commentary was to contrast the efforts of the African American Soldiers during the war with the substandard rewards that awaited them in the arms of Jim Crow.

The United States Post Office Department refused to distribute this particular issue through the national mail, which helped to solidify the publication's contents as credible.[27] The vilification of the Negro Soldier to the French people--largely oral and unofficial--reached a "low" in the official document, August 1918, entitled "Secret Information Concerning Black Troops" which instructed the French people to segregate themselves from Negroes lest their women be assaulted and raped.[28] This document, written by Colonel Linard, the French liaison officer at the American General Headquarters, is identified in the following statement.

Secret Information Concerning Black American Troops

> [To the] French Military Mission. stationed with the American Army. August 7, 1918. Secret information concerning the Black American Troops.
>
> It is important for French officers who have been called upon to exercise command over black American troops, or to live in close contact with them, to have an exact idea of the position occupied by Negroes in the United States. The information set forth in the following communication ought to be given to these officers and it is to their interest to have these matters known and widely disseminated. It will devolve likewise on the French Military Authorities, through the medium of the Civil Authorities, to give information on this subject to the

French population residing in the cantonments occupied by American colored troops.

1. The American attitude upon the Negro question may seem a matter for discussion to many French minds. But we French are not in our province if we undertake to discuss what some call “prejudice.” *[recognize that] American opinion is unanimous on the "color question," and does not admit of any discussion.*

The increasing number of Negroes in the United States (about 15,000,000) would create for the white race in the Republic a menace of degeneracy were it not that an impassable gulf has been made between them.

As this danger does not exist for the French race, *the French public has become accustomed to treating the Negro with familiarity and indulgence.*

This indulgence and this familiarity are matters of grievous concern to the Americans. They consider them an affront to their national policy. They are afraid that contact with the French will inspire in black Americans aspirations which to them (the whites) appear intolerable. *It is of the utmost importance that every effort be made to avoid profoundly estranging American opinion.*

Although a citizen of the United States, the black man is regarded by the white American as an inferior being with whom relations of business or service only are possible. The black is constantly being censured for his want of intelligence and discretion, his lack of civic and professional conscience, and for his tendency toward undue familiarity.

1. The vices of the Negro are a constant menace to the American who has to repress them sternly. For instance, the black American troops in France have, by themselves, given rise to as many complaints for attempted rape as all the rest of the army. And yet the (black American) soldiers sent us have been the choicest with respect to physique and morals, for the number disqualified at the time of mobilization was enormous. We must prevent the rise of any pronounced degree of intimacy between French officers and black officers. We may be courteous and amiable with these lasts, but we cannot deal with them on the same place as with white American officers without deeply wounding the latter. We must not eat with them, must not shake hands or seek to talk or meet with them outside of the requirements of military service.

2. We must not commend too highly the black American troops, particularly in the presence of [white] Americans. It is alright to recognize their good qualities and their services, but only in moderate terms, strictly in keeping with the truth.

3. Make a point of keeping the native cantonment population from “spoiling” the Negroes. [White} Americans become greatly incensed at any public expression of intimacy between white women and black men. . . . Familiarity on the part of

> white women with black men is furthermore a source of profound regret to our experienced colonials who see in it an overweening menace to the prestige of the white race. Military authority cannot intervene directly in this question but it can through the civil authorities exercise some influence on the population.[29]

This directive was drafted on the insistence of the American Expeditionary Force Commander to be disseminated throughout the French armed forces as a preventative measure to reinforce the spirited of the American institution of segregation. It stressed the importance of not offending the sensibilities of the non-African American troops, but encouraged demeaning behavior toward African American Soldiers. All of whom were a part of a great American effort to spill blood on behalf of their (French) freedom. It was a miscarriage of justice on the part of the Wilson administration to allow such severe oversights in the tactical preparation of these American forces before allowing them to be sent into harm's way.

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[1]Lee, 9.

[2]W. E. B. DuBois, "The Negro and the War Department," *The Crisis*, no. 15 (May 1918), 7-8.

[3]Keene, 82.

[4]Chambers, 223.

[5]Bliss, Memorandum, 24 August 1917.

[6]Keene, 74.

[7]War Department General Orders No. 125, 22 September 1917, *Blacks in the United States Armed Forces*, vol. IV, item 19.

[8]Brigadier General Joseph E. Kuhn, Chief of War College Division, Memorandum for the Chief of Staff, 15 May 1917, Washington, DC: Military Archives Division, National Archives.

[9]Foner, 111.

[10]Major General Tasker H. Bliss, Memorandum for Secretary of War, Newton D. Baker, 3 September 1917, Washington, DC: Military Archives Division, National Achieves.

[11]Salter, 57.

[12]Ibid.

[13]Bliss, 3 September 1917.

[14]W. E. B. DuBois, *The Crisis*, May 1918, 14.

[15]Nalty, 112.

[16]Foner, 119.

[17]Emmett J. Scott, *The American Negro in the World War* (Chicago, IL: Homewood Press, 1919), 105.

[18]Ibid., 106.

[19]Ibid., 107.

[20]W. E. B. DuBois, "Help Us to Help," *The Crisis* (August 1918): 19.

[21]Foner, 120.

[22]Mershon and Scholossman, 6.

[23]Nalty, 113.

[24]Headquarters, 92nd Division, *Bulletin No. 35* (28 March 1918): item 108.

[25]Ibid.

[26]Foner, 122.

[27]Nalty and MacGregor, 88.

[28]L. D. Reddick, "The Negro Policy of the United States Army: 1775-1945," *The Journal of Negro History* 34, no. 1 (January 1949): 23.

[29]W. E. B. DuBois, "Documents of the War," *The Crisis* (May 1919): 16-17.

CHAPTER 4

THE 93RD AND 92ND INFANTRY DIVISIONS COMMITTED TO THE FIGHT

African American Combat Divisions Answer the Frenchmen's Call

The 92nd and the 93rd Divisions were eager to join the American Expeditionary Force's theatre of war. However, there are several points of historical significance concerning their involvement that will require further examination. These divisions were essentially made up of African American enlisted Soldiers, a minority percentage of African American officers, and a remaining majority of Caucasian male officers. African American division demographics, such as these, were the norm throughout the duration of the Great War. There were also similarities in the amount of predeployment training receive. Unfortunately, these were the only common threads shared by each division. Their tables of organization were vastly different from each other, and in the case of the 93rd Division, there was a deviance from every other American infantry division within the American Expeditionary Forces. The War Department made a concerted effort to resource all of the African American combat divisions with as many quality Soldiers possible. Thus, an effort was made to activate existing African American National Guard units for combat duty; however, this method of allocation was limited. The 92nd Division had the benefit of receiving a generous portion of National Guard Soldiers, while the 93rd Division was forced to establish an infantry regiment comprised entirely of enlisted draftees.

In spite of shortcomings in training, equipment, and in some instances personnel, both the 92nd and 93rd Infantry Divisions proved to be as solid in their operational duties

as any other American Expeditionary Force unit. This chapter will explore the differences between the 92nd Infantry Division, the 93rd Infantry Division, and the American Expeditionary Forces' remaining divisions. It will identify their (92nd and 93rd Infantry Division) intended purpose, mission, and ultimate performances under the conditions of American segregation. Lastly, it will focus on how their combat actions influenced African Americans (stateside and in theatre), the people of France, the American Expeditionary Forces command, and the mainstream American public.

"As in the decisions about black officers, here, too, decisions concerning the formation, assignment, and training of over 30,000 black combat troops were governed by political and administrative considerations rather than by military needs."[1] Arthur E. Barbeau (noted historian) states that the status quo within the United States mandated that African American combat troops would have to be generated and trained in organizations smaller than a regiment to appease political opposition. This reality assured that these African American combat multipliers would have issues with internal cohesiveness and battlefield coordination. W. E. B. Du Bois' opinion on this phenomenon was clearly articulated in the May 1918 edition of the *Crisis*. "Again, the Ninety-second Division of Negro troops was established by the Secretary of War and approved by President Wilson over the protest of the General Staff; but no effort was made to secure for this division certain necessary persons of technical training. . . . The permission to make such transfers has been denied by the War Department. Unless this decision is reversed, the Ninety-second Division is bound to be a failure as a unit organization. Is it possible that persons in the War Department wish this division to be a failure?"[2] The results of the War Department's policy were that each of these divisions would be resourced through the

activation of existing National Guard units. According to correspondence from General Bliss to Secretary of War Baker, "The black National Guard units that became federalized during the war were the 15th New York Infantry; 8th Illinois Infantry; 1st Battalion, DC Infantry; 9th Battalion, Ohio Infantry; 1st Separate 8th Illinois Infantry; 1st Battalion, DC Infantry; 9th Battalion , Ohio Infantry; 1st Separate Company, Massachusetts Infantry; Company L, 6th Massachusetts Infantry; 1st Separate Company, Connecticut infantry; 1st Separate Company, Maryland Infantry; and Separate Company G, Tennessee Infantry."[3] When federalization was complete, only the 15th New York and the 8th Illinois were near full regimental strength. The 1st DC Infantry and the 9th Illinois, Ohio each had less than 1,000 Soldiers, and the various separate companies had less than 150 each.[4] While the numbers for creating a division were deficient, the esprit de corps within these National Guard units were positive. These volunteer forces enjoyed considerable status in the African American community and were considered by the military (and by themselves) far superior to the African American draftee.[5] The same could not be said for the African American draftees who were used to flesh out remaining regiments. Such recruits were mainly southern born and raised in the share cropping system. Most were illiterate field hand types who had minimal formalized education. Therefore, they were generally written off by their fellow National Guard Soldiers as inferior and largely ignored by the African American press.[6]

Camp Des Moines, Iowa, provided a significant number of African American officers, but it was also commonly believed at this time that Caucasian officers of southern descent were better suited to manage African American Soldiers. This myth had a duel effect on the functioning of the 92nd and 93rd Divisions. First of all, it sent most

of the Camp Des Moines graduates to service and support units, thus diverting them from combat arms service. Secondly, the segregated divisions became a depository for Caucasian officers who were not experienced or proficient enough to merit positions within the mainstream units of the American Expeditionary Forces. This does not mean that all Caucasian officers assigned to either the 92nd or 93rd Infantry Divisions were subcaliber; however, there were a higher percentage of them within these units than in equivalent Caucasian divisions. Many military officials during this period were frequently quoted as saying that it was crucial for the black regiments to have only the most experienced white officers. However, nearly all of the white junior officers who were initially assigned to the 92nd were recent graduates of Officers Training Course. General Ballou's statement that the division "was made the dumping ground for discards, both white and black" summed up common sentiments during the unit's formation.[7]

The introduction of African American and Caucasian officers to the 92nd and 93rd Division generated one other prickly issue. Maintaining the spirit of the status quo meant that no African American officer could be put in any Caucasian officer's chain of command as a supervisor. The irony is that down to the company level there were forms of officer integration; however, mechanisms were emplaced to ensure that the African American officer did not exceed his Caucasian contemporaries in rank or status. This also induced the inherent hostilities of the Caucasian officers toward their African American counterparts. Racial clashes inevitably occurred. A 92nd Division officer, Captain Lewis W. Wallace, and several fellow officers were arrested following a heated verbal exchange with Caucasian officers near the American Café in Gondercourt. Wallace's statement said that he and his fellow officers were assaulted with racial slurs by Caucasian officers who

said that “American nigger is dangerous and no good.” Captain Wallace and company retorted in kind, and were summarily arrested. An investigation of inquiry found Captain Wallace and his fellow African American officers at fault.[8]

The specific differences in the management of junior officers by race were a reoccurring problem before, during, and after the war’s hostilities. These issues were not common at the senior officer levels because with the exception of Colonel F. A. Denison of the 370th Infantry Regiment, there were no senior African American officers serving in leadership position. Colonel Denison was relieved of command for questionable health reasons prior to the regiment’s combat debut, so this possible irritant to the American Expeditionary Forces Command Group was effectively neutralized. “Colonel F. A. Denison, the regiment’s commanding officer, was relieved of his command, allegedly because of ill health, and was replaced by Colonel T. A. Roberts, formerly of the General Staff. Other white officers were also placed in a number of key regimental positions.[9]

The adherence to political pressures bearing weight on the American Expeditionary Forces Command to maintain the status quo created a gulf between the standards of organizing combat divisions. The 92nd Division was the closer of the two African American divisions in matching the organization and equipment practices of the mainstream Caucasian combat divisions comprising the American Expeditionary Forces. There were wide discrepancies in the comparison of training opportunities and combat readiness along every other category, but the 92nd Infantry Division was generally resourced the same way as every other infantry division. This was not the case for the 93rd Infantry Division. Its formation and employment were outside the majority of mainstream unit norms; therefore, the 93rd Infantry Division will be the first unit to be

examined under its differences, purposes, missions, performances, and its residual affects on external parties.

The 93rd Infantry Division in Combat

The only American infantry division to serve in combat during the Great War without the benefit of a Field Artillery Brigade, divisional troops, or trains was the 93rd Infantry Division (Provisional). The division was organized at Camp Stuart, Virginia, in December 1917 from the colored National Guard units from the states of New York, Illinois, Connecticut, Maryland, Massachusetts, Ohio, Tennessee, the District of Columbia, and from South Carolina (selective service draftees only).[10] The division was composed of the 369th, the 370th, the 371st, and the 372nd Infantry Regiments. The 93rd Infantry Division was not considered a true division but was essentially four separate infantry regiments without logistics or artillery support. They were assigned to the French, reorganized according to French tables, and used as integral parts of French divisions on the Western Front. The division was instrumental in sustaining the French offensives in the Oise-Aislne, the Vosges, and the Champagne.[11] One American journalist wrote: "Being encased in the French Army to a greater degree than any other American contingent--They are the only doughboys supported by French artillery--These chocolate soldiers are temporarily in a state of splendid isolation so far as the remainder of the American expeditionary force is concerned."[12]

The American Expeditionary Forces Commander, General Pershing, was pressured by the French government to release an American division and attach it under French Command to replenish their combatant numbers. General Pershing was unwilling to attach any American division level unit to the French; however, he saw the provisional

93rd Infantry Division as a solution. Since the unit was composed of only four infantry regiments, it would satisfy both the needs of the French and the American Expeditionary Forces Command. General Pershing stated that "Under approved arrangements with French these four Negro regiments are to be used as combat units with French divisions. As these regiments are combat units they should be brought to full strength before being sent abroad and maintained at such."[13] Additionally, "The question of the best use to make of the large number of Negroes being received from the draft is under consideration. It is proposed to use these for labor service battalions, pioneer infantry regiments, and to form the remainder into regiments of infantry. The French say they can train and use all colored regiments of infantry we can supply."[14] This decision made the 93rd Infantry Division (Provisional) the first African American combat element to reach French soil.

The Harlem Hell Fighters

The 369th Infantry Regiment, also known as the Harlem Hell fighters, deployed out of Hoboken, New York, on 12 December 1917. The remaining 93rd Infantry Division regiments sailed in February, March, and April of 1918.[15] The 369th Infantry Regiment was used as a labor unit for the first ninety days upon arrival to France. This predicament caused a ripple that lowered unit morale since the Soldiers were expecting to be employed as combatants. Once the regiment was attached to the French, they moved to become part of the 16th Division, 8th Corps, 4th French Army at Givry-en-Argonne. In April of 1918, the 369th Infantry Regiment, a combat force representing only 1 percent of the American Expeditionary Force, held over 20 percent of all territory assigned to American Expeditionary Forces.[16] It would maintain this percentage until early July of

the same year. The French were tasked to train the 369th Infantry Regiment in their doctrine. This feat proved to be challenging because of the obvious language barrier; however, the host nation was generally pleased with the regiment's progress. "The same enthusiasm on the part of the French instructors was evident in this regiment. I met the divisional commander and a number of other officers of adjoining sectors and all were enthusiastic in their comments about the progress and bearing of the 369th."[17] The 369th became familiar with French primary weapons, such as the Lebel rifle. The Springfield was inefficient due to the lack of available ammunition. Also, the Lebel's accuracy was grossly inferior to the Springfield's capability. However, the troops of the 369th grew accustomed to all equipment issued to them since they were the only tools of war on hand. The only American issued articles that were routinely used by the 93rd Infantry Division (Provisional) units were their uniforms. Training and equipment issues were an adjustment for the 369th Infantry Regiment, but this did not prevent their quick immersion in combat with determined German forces.

During the latter days of May 1918, the first of many heroic combat actions by the 369th Infantry was immortalized by the deeds of Sergeant Henry Johnson and Private Needham Roberts. These two Soldiers were the first American servicemen to receive the French *Croix de Guerre* for distinguished service during the Great War. Each Soldier was a private during the operation and a native of the New York/New Jersey region. Henry Johnson was from Albany, New York, and Needham Roberts came from Trenton, New Jersey.[18] There was a skirmish between a German raiding party and the 369th outpost along their trench line manned by Privates Johnson and Roberts. The engagement ended with both Soldiers being wounded after forcing the German raiding party to retreat.

Colonel William Hayward, the commander of the 369th Infantry Regiment, wrote the following statement to the wife of Private Johnson:

> Your husband, Private Henry Johnson is in my regiment, 369th United States Infantry, formerly the Fifteenth New York infantry. He has been at all times a good soldier and a good boy of fine morale and upright character. To these admirable traits he has lately added the most convincing numbers of fine courage and fight ability. I regret to say at the moment that he is in the hospital, seriously, but not dangerously wounded, the wounds having been received under such circumstances that every one of us in the regiment would be pleased and proud to trade places with him.[19]

In honor of their bravery and sacrifice, each man earned both the French *Croix de Guerre* in addition to the American Distinguished Service Cross. Their *Croix de Guerre* citations read as follows.

> Johnson, Henry--soldier--number 103.348 Company "C" of the 369th American Infantry Regiment. "Finding himself on double guard night duty and having been attacked by a group of about a dozen Germans, he disarmed one by gunshot and gravely wounded two others with a knife. Although having received three wounds from a revolver and grenades at the beginning of the action, he was able to safely evacuate his wounded comrade who was about to be killed by the enemy--and continued to fight until he had put the Germans to rout. He gave magnificent examples of courage and strength."[20]

> Roberts, Needham--soldier--number 13369 Company "C" of the 369th American Infantry Regiment. "Being on double sentry duty during the night was assaulted and grievously wounded in his leg by a group of Germans continuing fighting by throwing grenades, although he was prone on the ground, up to the retreat of the enemy. Good and brave soldier. The general requested that the citation of the division commander to the soldier be changed to the citation of the orders of the Army."[21]

These exploits were highly influential in garnering respect and appreciation from the French. Their culture was not a pristine discrimination-free society since their imperialist ventures into the African Continent yielded sentiments of inferiority toward African natives. However, they still did not harbor the acrid positions of oppression endorsed by the United States' Jim Crow practices. There were some instances of the

American mainstream media utilizing the successes of the 369th Infantry Regiment as positive propaganda for African American combat services. Irvin Cobb, an American journalist, was initially skeptical of their combat abilities since their training prior to reaching the French was considered below par. “Perhaps this was because we had grown accustomed to thinking of our Negroes as members of labor battalions working along the lines of communication uploading ships and putting up warehouses and building depots and felling trees in the forests of France.”[22] Once the actions of Johnson and Needham were made public Cobb later wrote, “N-i-g-g-e-r will merely be another way of spelling the word American.”[23]

The 369th Infantry Regiment is usually considered the premier fighting unit of the 93rd Infantry Division. It was essentially the first American combat regiment to go into action, the first regiment to reach the Rhine River, and the only American combat regiment to remain in combat for 191 consecutive days.[24] The 369th Infantry Regiment’s efforts in the war led it to receiving the *Croix de Guerre* for exceptional conduct in combat as a collective unit. This in itself helped the 93rd Division receive positive attention from the American Expeditionary Forces Command and the War Department, but these accomplishments were not enough to erase the sting of the American Expeditionary Forces policies aimed at keeping the African American Soldiers in their place. The American information operations objective, mentioned earlier in Colonel Linard’s (American Expeditionary Forces Staff) document “Secret Information Concerning Black American Troops,” was to explain to the French authorities how and why to keep African American Soldiers from experiencing true civil liberty. This operation remained in effect throughout the time the 369th Infantry Regiment was

attached to the French. Therefore, despite the unit's courageous reputation, its Soldiers were not properly awarded the basic expressions of gratitude due to their hard work. This occurrence was not exclusively felt by the 369th Infantry Regiment. The 370th, 371st, and 372nd all endured similar treatment.

The 370th, 371st, and 372nd Infantry Regiments

The remaining infantry regiments of the 93rd Infantry Division all faced the same advantages, problems, and issues facing the 369th Infantry Regiment. With the exception of the 371st Infantry Regiment, all of the other units were comprised of former National Guard Soldiers who had the benefit of previous military experience. The differences (as addressed in previous chapters of this thesis) between the National Guard soldiering pool from the northeastern America and the draftees from the southeastern portion of the United States was a significant gap in literacy rates. Nonetheless, these gaps did not diminish the fighting capabilities of the 370th Infantry Regiment. The same could be said of all of the National Guard based regiments. All (regiments) thoroughly distinguished themselves in action and had their share of individual combat heroics. "Four Negro regiments won the signal honor of being awarded the Croix de Guerre as a regiment. These were the 369th, the 370th, the 371st, and the 372nd."[25]

Aside from the credits and honors reaped upon the 93rd Infantry Division for its ability to adapt to French doctrine and equipment under fire, the division displayed an unparalleled sense of patriotic resolve. The German Army quickly grew to respect the fighting prowess of the African American units in opposition to their advancements within France. Several reports from former American POWs (pilots) indicated the German discomfort in facing troopers such as the Soldiers in the 93rd Infantry Division.

> Lieutenant Burgin, of Atlanta, said he told them there were 13,000,000 American Colored troops in France. He stated that this not only surprised the Germans, but appeared to depress them, for, he added, the Germans have a holy fear of colored troops and their knives wielded with skill and dexterity. . . . Lieutenant Clark, the Boston aviator, also said that the leading question put to him by the German military intelligence officers was: How many Negro troops have the Americans got over here? He stated that not knowing, he was frank in telling them that he did not know, but he believed there were several millions . . . the German officers who questioned him, greatly depressed.[26]

These incidents help to explain why the German authorities attempted to splinter the American Expeditionary Forces by attacking the 93rd Infantry Division's regiments with nonlethal information operations. These operations were also directed at the millions of African American citizens who made up over 10 percent of the United States' population as well. "The Negroes were told by the propagandists that in Europe there was no color line; that there the blacks were equal to the whites; that if Germany won the war the rights of Negroes throughout the world would equal those of whites."[27] There were other instances of German propaganda encouraging the African American Soldier to break contact, surrender, and support Germany in order to gain true freedom as a man. The "live and let live" leaflets that promised African American Soldiers a chance at freedom did not shake the fighting spirit of the 93rd Infantry Division's Soldiers. Reports of desertion and or defection were usually discredited upon closer scrutiny. It is amazing that African American troops did not desert in huge numbers, not so much due to the horrors of trench warfare as because of the sub humane treatment directed at them from their higher headquarters.[28]

Most Soldiers assigned to the regiments within the 93rd Division were affected by the American Expeditionary Forces' strategy to deny them the same liberties they were accustomed to being denied in the United States. These efforts, while not universally

embraced by the French, were still effective in preventing this battle worthy Soldiers from receiving decent rest and relaxation. A 93rd Division officer noted that "our enlisted men had enjoyed no real rest and absolutely no leaves whatever while we had been in France."[29]

The 93rd Infantry Division's successes were remarkable considering the handicaps they endured from the onset of preparation for combat. The reality of their efforts is that while they were proven to be exceptional fighters, there was also a fair share of failures. Many could be attributed to communication breaches, poor leadership, inadequate training, or even biased beliefs. However, the fact of the matter is that this division fought and died for the freedoms of foreigners while being denied the same freedoms at home. "During the front-line service of the 93rd Division its casualties were 584 men killed and 2,582 wounded. The total figure of 3,166 represents about 32 percent of the division."[30] The significance of African American blood shed on behalf of the war effort may have also indirectly attributed to the general assessment that the 93rd Infantry Division performed well under fire. These same labels of competence would not be attached to the African American regiments which fell directly under the American Expeditionary Forces Command. The 92nd Infantry Division's experiences during the Great War were similar in many ways to the 93rd; however, the stigma of cowardice and inefficiency plagued its reputation for years following the Armistice.

The 92nd Infantry Division

The 92nd Infantry Division was vastly different from its sister division supported by the French. It was composed primarily of the best 26,000 African American draftees the United States had to offer.[31] These top notch selectees were mostly from the southern

United States and were products of the agrarian-based share cropping demographics that dominated the African American communities of the region. “Many of them employed in the cotton fields or residing in the remote corners of the country, hardly knew there was a war in progress . . . that Uncle Sam would ever call them to serve in his army and even to go far across seas to a shadowy--to them, far off land . . . had never occurred to most of them even in dreams.”[32] There was also a preponderance of African American officers assigned to this division. The 92nd Infantry Division had approximately 600 African American officers, a significant difference than the 93rd; however, these divisions differed greatly in structure and personnel strength. The 92nd Infantry Division was patterned after the same tables of equipment that formatted all of the other divisions within the American Expeditionary Forces Command, so there was a definite divide between how the 92nd Infantry Division and the 93rd Infantry Division arrayed. The other obvious difference between these two divisions is that the 92nd Infantry Division operated as a division serving directly under the American Expeditionary Command Forces Headquarters, and with this configuration, there was not much to buffer the division from the inherent Jim Crow perspectives that were prevalent within the higher command. There was also an element of animosity between the 92nd Infantry commander and his immediate supervisor, a situation that did not help the division’s cause in the least. The close proximity of the 92nd Infantry Division to the American Expeditionary Command helped to fuel the ongoing connotation of combat inefficiency of the division more than anything else.

> The 92nd Division was composed of the 183rd Infantry Brigade, consisting of the 365th and 366th Infantry Regiments and the 350th Machine Gun Battalion:; the 184th Infantry Brigade, composed of the 367th and 368th Infantry

> Regiments and the 351st Machine Gun Battalion; the 167th Artillery Brigade consisting of the 349th, 350th, and 351st Artillery Regiments; the 317th Trench Mortar Battalion, the 317th Engineers' Regiment, the 317th Engineers Train, the 317th Ammunition Train, the 317th Supply Train, the 317th Train Headquarters, the 92nd Military Police Company; and the Sanitary Train comprising the 365th, 366th, 367th, and 368th Field Hospital and Ambulance Companies.[33]

The division had its full compliment of combat and combat support elements, but just as in the case of the 93rd Infantry Division, it was not permitted to train as a division until it reached the shores of Europe.

The Army War College commissioned Colonel A. A. Starbird of the Inspector General's Office to produce a study comparing the preparation and employment of the 92nd Infantry Division to the Caucasian based 35th Infantry Division.[34] His report noted key deficiencies in the training and equipping of the 92nd Infantry Division in comparison to its Caucasian counterpart. "Summarizing all conditions we find that although a certain amount of discipline was instilled in the division, only rudimentary training was given in the United States, by reason of a) the unfavorable type of bulk of the personnel, b) low strength, c) fluxuations in strength, d) large number of recruits received just prior to embarkation, e) lack of proper equipment, f) impossibility of central control, g) adverse climatic conditions, h) shortness of training period."[35] Colonel Starbird's report also found that there was a difference of eleven days training stateside between the two divisions (35th had sixty-seven and the 92nd had only fifty-six), and that the 35th Infantry Division was an existing National Guard Division. The 92nd Infantry Division, as already mentioned, was made up on draftee Soldiers. Lastly, the 35th Infantry Division commander had the benefit of conducting a predeployment site survey of his perspective division's area of operations, while General Charles C. Ballou, the 92nd Infantry Division Commander, did not see France until he arrived in theater with his

troops.[36] These inconsistencies between the two divisions illustrate a huge discrepancy in their war-fighting abilities upon arrival to the American Expeditionary Forces theatre of war. Unfortunately, this was just the beginning of their up hill journey toward combat effectiveness since an ongoing feud between General Ballou and the 2nd Army Commander, General Robert L. Bullard, would amplify every defect found in this already embattled unit.

The 92nd Infantry Division Commander, General Ballou, was a firm believer in the supremacy of Caucasians over African Americans in all matters; however, he was a tepid advocator of recognizing the abilities of a select few African Americans who were responsible commissioned officers under his command. He felt that his division's command structure could become more efficient if "the army had stressed quality rather than numbers in commissioning blacks and assigning white officers not poisoned by racial prejudice."[37] While he was still a staunch believer in the status quo, General Ballou was quick to point out the problems associated with Caucasian prejudices directed toward African American Soldiers based solely on their contempt of their race. General Bullard, the 2nd Army Commander, on the other hand, was seriously averse to perceived benefits in using African American combat units. General Bullard made it known publicly and privately that he felt General Ballou was an ineffective combat division leader and would have preferred that he command a service and support outfit. Bullard had previous experience with African American combat Soldiers during the Spanish American Wars while serving with the 3rd Alabama Volunteer Infantry (Colored), but his memories of this vibrant cohesive unit did permeate his hatred of the 92nd Infantry Division's commander. "If you need combat soldiers, and especially if you need them in a hurry,

don't put your time upon Negroes."[38] Each of these personalities, while they were averse to one another, shared the common bond of believing in the limited capabilities of the African American Soldier. General Ballou, like any competitive army officer, strove to see his unit become successful; however, there were limits to how far his influence could reach in terms of his own prejudiced thinking and nullification by General Bullard. These realities and the fact that the American Expeditionary Forces Command understood that the African American combat divisions made up less than 4 percent of its total force made it easier for the 92nd Infantry Division to be dissected, examined, and criticized for the most minute actions.

The high concentration of African American officers assigned to the 92nd Infantry Division made these officers open targets for the American Expeditionary Command. Initially, the 92nd Infantry Division was afforded a more liberal training environment than its sister division once it arrived to France. It became adjusted to the French and their practices of warfare tactics since their primary training was French lead. The United States asked the British to assist in training the 92nd, but the British flatly refused.[39] General Pershing insisted that they train these American units, but Washington's sensibilities deemed that it was not practical to insult the British so the division would train with the more permissive French.[40] Eventually, the welcoming approach taken by the French troubled the American Expeditionary Forces Command, so restrictive measures were emplaced to maintain the racial divide.

Similar incidents of Caucasian Soldiers spreading untrue rumors of African American Soldiers being chronic rapists and of poor character to the French populace were common in both the 92nd and 93rd Infantry Divisions areas of operations. The

difference was that in the 92nd Infantry Division there was a more robust presence of the higher command to police the guidelines that Colonel Linard's memorandum had specified to maintain distances between the French and African American Soldiers. African American officers and Soldiers were exposed to numerous accusations of indecent acts, such as rape, that were proven to be baseless in many instances. These conditions weakened the positions of the African American officer because the United States chain of command strongly discouraged them from attempting to shield their Soldiers from such accusations.[41] Such conditions were not conducive to achieving combat effectiveness in the hearts and minds of the African American Soldier.

The situation concerning the alleged immoral actions of the 92nd Infantry Division's Soldiers in France made its way back to the United States. The overwhelming and negative images of African American Soldiers behaving in barbaric fashion antagonized African American civil rights leaders, organizations, and the African American press. To alleviate these sentiments of betrayal and attempt to calm a group that represented over 10 percent of the nation's population during an active war, the Wilson administration agreed to send an investigative team to make a few efforts to boost the morale of black troops. To allay unrest among African American Soldiers, Robert Russa Moton, a principal of Tuskegee Institute, was sent to France to gain a clear picture. He was authorized to go anywhere and get information from any source in the American Expeditionary Forces area of operations.[42] His investigations revealed that most of the allegations ended in exoneration during court-martial proceedings or were thrown out prior to the start of the procedures. "When Moton subjected the records to critical examination, only seven cases of the crime could be found. Of the seven, only two had

been found guilty and convicted, and one of the two convictions had been turned down by the General Headquarters."[43]

Aside from the negative effects of the "Whispering Gallery," a system of deceptive rumors involving the Soldiers of the 92nd Infantry Division, there was one incident involving a single battalion of a regiment that was inferred across the entire division. This occurrence was used to label them as undependable combat forces while under fire. Unlike the 93rd Infantry Division whose regiments were led by a majority of Caucasian commissioned officers, the 92nd had a large contingent of African American junior officers leading company level formations into combat. The American Expeditionary Forces Command's climate encouraged the belief that African American troops could not fully function under the supervision of African American officers. "There was . . . little question about the fighting record of the four regiments- The 369th, 370th, 371st, and 372nd--which had been brigaded with French Divisions; but when it came to the 92nd Division, there was a subtle and persistent rumor in . . . France, that the Negro officers had been practically a failure."[44]

The 368th Infantry Regiment had limited experience in combat operations prior to the offensive of mid September 1918. It along with the rest of the 92nd Infantry Division limited operations to patrols. However, this regiment was selected to fill a gap between the 77th American Division and the closest unit of the French 4th Army. The gap extend 800 meters and it was critical that it be filled in order to meet the directives issued from Field Order No.12, which required each unit to maintain contact with the troops to its right and left.[45] The 368th Infantry Regiment was given a difficult task and it was woefully unprepared to assume the mission. Soldiers did not have the proper wire cutting

equipment to negotiate the barb wired trench obstacles, there was a shortage of proper flare grenades (used to signal movements), and worst of all they had no American artillery support. The 92nd's artillery regiments were attached to other divisions, so the 368th Infantry Regiment had to rely on French artillery systems for indirect support. The French were not as dependable as the division's organic artillery regiments.[46] Also, "the officers had the special problem--almost incredible except for convincing testimony in military records--that they had not been supplied with maps nor assigned specific objectives."[47]

The regiment's primary mission of liaison between the two divisions was ultimately a failure due to a breakdown of communications from within. There was confusion when one battalion commander ordered a withdrawal during the evening of the first day of battle, and the troubles grew from that point on.[48] The regiment endured severe enemy direct and indirect fires, and advanced on an uneven front. Companies would advance without coordination from their battalions, and battalions would conduct movements uncoordinated with the regimental headquarters. The regiment eventually culminated on the fifth day. There were 42 Soldiers killed in action, 16 died of wounds, and over 300 wounded. The 368th Infantry Regiment's conduct was considered to be negative; however, its performance was typical of green regiments thrust into combat for the first time. Many Caucasian units of the same stature experienced the same problems of communications and maintaining contact with the enemy. "The same AEF history explained the reasons; this was the 35th Division's first battle; liaison and headquarters organization proved inefficient; food and supplies were delivered with great difficulty; so

morale disintegrated and when the lead elements began to retreat, the entire division fell back three kilometers before a line was reestablished."[49]

Upon conclusion of the 368th Infantry Regiment's difficulties in its first battle, General Ballou wasted no time in assessing the causes for their failure. Four African American officers were court-martialed for cowardice during the unit's actions; however, they were all over turned by President Wilson.[50] General Bullard's dislike of General Ballou compounded the growing distaste for the 92nd Infantry Division. "Two days ago and again yesterday the 92nd Division would not fight; couldn't be made to attack in any effective sense. The general who commands them couldn't make them fight."[51] The standard belief around the American Expeditionary Forces Headquarters was that the 92nd Infantry Division was worthless in battle. General Ballou's Chief of Staff, Colonel Greer, wrote, "They have in fact been dangerous to no one except themselves and women . . . it is an undoubted fact, shown by our experience in war, and well known to all people familiar with negroes, that the average negro is naturally a coward."[52]

Just as in the 93rd Infantry Division, there were also spectacular performances of 92nd Infantry Division Soldiers during combat operations. Private Joseph James of the 368th Infantry Regiment was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for extraordinary heroism in action, 27 September 1918, in the Argonne Forest.[53] The entire First Battalion of the 367th Infantry Regiment was awarded the French *Croix de Guerre* for bravery under fire. The 167th Field Artillery Brigade was probably the most notable combat unit assigned to the 92nd Infantry Division. Though its contributions were limited to the first offensive before the war ended, the American Expeditionary Forces Commander, General Pershing, highly commended the brigade:

> Permit me to extend to the officers and men of the 167th Field Artillery Brigade, especially the 351st regiment, my congratulations for the excellent manner in which they conducted themselves during the twelve days they were on the front. The work of the unit was so meritorious that after the accomplishments of the brigade were brought to my attention I was preparing to assign the unit to very important work in the second offensive. You men acted like veterans, never failing to reach your objective, once orders had been given you. I wish to thank you for your work.[54]

The African American combat divisions that were permitted to engage in combat during the Great War were disadvantaged along multiple fronts from the start. They were systematically denied the benefits of training collectively as regimental or divisional formations. There were many instances of inadequate equipment and inefficient training practices, but in spite of all shortcomings, both the 92nd and 93rd Infantry Divisions proved to be as solid in their operational duties as any other American Expeditionary Force unit. The exportation of the American system of segregation placed undue stress on these African Americans who were exposed to the same rigors of combat as their fellow Caucasian Americans. The unavailability of proper rest and relaxation and the constant reminders of racial inferiority being broadcast from their own higher command made their experiences of liberating France a hallow victory. It is a wonder that many of these unappreciated souls did not take the German psychological operations ploy to defect for equality in Germany. While American oppression was rampant throughout the American Expeditionary Forces in the theater of operations, the 92nd Infantry Division received a dampened blow from its assault. The French command offered some buffer to the outrageous ploys used against both divisions to prevent African Americans from experiencing true freedoms of equality as men. However, the 92nd Infantry Division was not in as good a position to deflect these bombardments. The hatred between the 92nd Infantry Division Commander and the 2nd Army Commander exacerbated the growing

myth that the division was an incompetent organization. Every action that the 92nd made was observed under the lenses of negative biased beliefs; therefore, the unit's reputation would suffer years of perceived failure in the eyes of the United States Army.

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[2]Ibid., 71.

[3]Colonel William S. Graves, Memorandum for the Adjutant General, "Training Cadres for Colored Units," 31 December 1917, Washington, DC: Military Archives Division, National Archives.

[4]Salter, 57.

[5]Barbeau and Henri, 71.

[6]Ibid., 70.

[7]Ibid., 67.

[8]Court Martial of Captain Lewis W. Wallace (8 September 1918), Altercation with some white officers-reason for arrest and court martial, RG120, NARS.

[9]Ibid. Also see handwritten memorandum from Captain Stuart Brasin, Liaison Officer 370th Infantry, to Chief Liaison Officer (October 5, 1918). See also a memorandum (October 9, 1918) for Inspector General AEF from Lieutenant Colonel R.I. McKenney, recommending the immediate replacement by white officers of all colored field officers and subsequent relief and replacement by white officers of all colored officers, RG120, NARS.

[10]American Expeditionary Forces-Divisions, *Order of Battle of the United States Land Forces in the World War*, prepared in the Historical Section, Army War College, United States Printing Office, 1944

[11]Lee, 5.

[12]Lincoln Eyre, "Bush Germans Better Watch That Chocolate Front," *Literary Digest* 57 (15 June 1918):44, citation from the *New York World*.

[13]General Staff, *Cable History of the Subject of Colored Soldiers* (Washington, DC: Military Archives Division, National Archives, 3 June 1918), 692.

[14]Nalty and MacGregor, 82.

[15]American Battle Monuments Commission, *93rd Division Summary of Operations in the World War* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1944), 5.

[16]Charles, H. Williams, *Sidelights on Negro Soldiers* (Norwood, MA: Ambrose Press, Inc., 1923) 197; and Allison W. Sweeney, *History of the American Negro in the Great World War* (New York, NY: Negro Universities Press, 1969), 137.

[17]Colonel T. A. Roberts Memorandum for the Chief of Staff, American Expeditionary Force, 8 May 1918, Military Archives Division, National Archives, Washington, DC.

[18]Scott, 218.

[19]Ibid.

[20]Albert E. Williams, *Black Warriors: A Chronicle of African Americans in the Military* (Bryn Mawr, PA, Buy Books on the web.com, 1999), 145.

[21]Scott, 219.

[22]Irvin S. Cobb, *The Glory of the Coming; What Mine Eyes Have Seen of Americans in Action in This Year of Grace and Allied Endeavor* (New York, NY: George H. Doran, 1918), 283-84.

[23]Barbeau and Henri, 117.

[24]Williams, 144.

[25]Scott, 220.

[26]Ibid., 277.

[27]Ibid., 346.

[28]Barbeau and Henri, 135.

[29]Monroe Mason and Author Furr, *The American Negro Soldier with the Red Hand of France*, 1921 (Boston, MA: Cornhill Publishers, 1921), 43-44.

[30]Ibid.

[31]Salter, 56.

[32]Sweeney, 198.

[33]Ibid., 199.

[34]Barbeau and Henri, 140.

[35]U.S. Army War College, 55.

[36]Barbeau and Henri, 141.

[37]Nalty, 115.

[38]Major General Robert Lee Bullard, USA Retired, *Personalities and Reminiscences of the Great War* (Garden City, New York, 1925), p.298.

[39]John J. Pershing, *My Experiences in the World War*, vol. 1 (New York, NY: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1931), 2:45

[40]Barbeau and Henri,139.

[41]Barbeau, and Florette, 144; and Ballou, "Sidelights," 21-22.

[42]Felix James, **"**Robert Russa Moton and The Whispering Gallery After World War I," *The Journal of Negro History* 62, no. 3 (July 1977): 220

[43]Robert Russa Moton, *1867-1940 Finding a Way Out: An Autobiography* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Page and Co., 1921), 254-56.

[44]Emmett J. Scott, *Scott's Official History of the American Negro in the World War* (Chicago: Homewood Press, 1919), 291.

[45]U.S., *American Battle Monuments Commission, 92d Division Summary of Operations in the World War* (Washington, DC: 1944), 11.

[46]Barbeau and Henri, 150.

[47]DuBois, "History of the Black Man," 80; Brown, 18-19; U.S., American Battle Monuments Commission, 11; and Lee, 23-24.

[48]Scott Papers, 111-4, Report from noncoms, 368th Infantry, 5-6.

[49]Shipley Thomas, *The History of the A.E.F.* (New York, NY: George H. Doran Company, 1920), 256.

[50]James, 238.

[51]Bullard, *Personalities and Reminiscences*, 296.

[52]U.S. Army, War College, 110-11.

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CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The beginning of World War II offered the prospects of having more African American Soldiers serve than ever before. The nation's first African American flag officer, General Benjamin O. Davis, Sr. was appointed, and there was an established policy of designating no less than 10 percent of the Army's active population for African American representation. Despite this established policy, African American did not reach the 10 percent threshold at anytime during the war, and the percentages for combat unit participation were even lower. The three Black divisions, the 92nd Infantry, 93rd Infantry, and 2nd Cavalry Divisions--saw very little combat action. Aside from the 332nd Fighter Squadron, those African American combat units that did engage in combat did so only during the final three months of the war. These numbers suggest that the combat actions of the African American Soldier in World War I might not have assisted in increasing the combat roles of African Americans in World War II. However, it could also be assumed that their participation contributed to the passage of a 10 percent quota that was extended throughout all branches under the War Department in 1940. This was a significant action, considering an executive order by the president of the United States was the end result. A special cabinet of African American activists, inspired by the diligent services rendered to an ungrateful nation by the Soldiers of the 92nd and 93rd Infantry Divisions on the shores of France during the year 1918, drafted this order.

Prior to the United States entry into the First World War, the nation's negative tone and official policies toward African Americans forced them to survive under American democracy as second class citizens. The same ideology was prevalent in the

establishment of the American Expeditionary Force. The African American Soldier was essentially engaged with an enemy on two separate fronts. The first opponent was the ingrained bigotry of Jim Crow, an anomaly that mutated from post Reconstruction, and the other was his potential adversary in Europe. Blacks silently endured economic disenfranchisement: such as sharecropping, lynching, and poor educational support; however, they contributed a disproportionate percentage of military service to a country that offered only scraps of humanity. African Americans and many of their civil rights leaders saw military service as a down payment on a chance of equality within a representative democracy. This was the state of black America in the earliest phases of the World War I.

The African American combat divisions that were permitted to engage in combat during the Great War were disadvantaged along multiple fronts from the start. They were systematically denied the benefits of training collectively as regimental or divisional formations before departing for France. This reality was also true for certain Caucasian army divisions; however, the fact of the matter is African American divisions were subjected to hostile racist policies that damaged their morale. Army senior leaders conveniently forgot these facts when the orders were given to generate post combat action reports on the actions of African American divisions. There were many instances of inadequate equipment and inefficient training practices, but in spite of all shortcomings, both the 92nd and 93rd Infantry Divisions proved to be as effective in their operational duties as any other American Expeditionary Force unit.

The exportation of the American system of segregation placed undue stress on these African Americans who were exposed to the same rigors of combat as their fellow

Caucasian Americans. The unavailability of proper rest and relaxation and the constant reminders of racial inferiority being broadcast from their own higher command made their experiences of liberating France a hallow victory. It is a wonder that many of these unappreciated souls did not take the German psychological operations offer to defect for equality in Germany.

The American Expeditionary Forces directive "Secret Information Concerning Black American Troops," a document disseminated throughout the French armed forces was a mean spirited attempt to reinforce the American institution of segregation. It stressed the importance of not offending the sensibilities of the non-African American troops, but encouraged demeaning behavior toward African American Soldiers. All of whom were a part of a great American effort to spill blood on behalf of their (French) freedom. It was a miscarriage of justice on the part of the Wilson administration to allow such severe oversights in the tactical preparation of these American forces before allowing them to be sent into harm's way.

The 92nd Infantry Division received was removed from the rampant racial oppression that flowed throughout the American Expeditionary Forces theatre of operations. The French command offered some buffer to the outrageous ploys used against both divisions to prevent African Americans from experiencing true freedoms of equality as men. However, the 92nd Infantry Division was not well positioned to deflect most of the racist policies directed at them. The hatred between the 92nd Infantry Division Commander and the 2nd Army Commander exacerbated the growing myth that the division was an incompetent organization. Every action that the 92nd made was

observed under the lenses of negative biased beliefs; therefore, the unit's reputation would suffer decades of perceived failure in the eyes of the United States Army.

The combat actions of the 92nd and 93rd Infantry Divisions during the Great War represented some of the most heroic actions of the war. There were also actions that could be considered a part of the lowest spectrum of combat performance too. The point is that these divisions performed as well as, or better than, the average American Expeditionary Forces division throughout the conduct of this war. African American combat Soldiers were expected to perform at optimal levels on the battlefield while enduring lower emphasis on combat training, and the constant reminders of their legal inferiority to their fellow American Soldiers. The War Department ordered detail reports that criticized 92nd and 93rd Infantry Division combat actions, but neglected to include these extenuating circumstances. The general conclusions of unreliability and mass incompetence on the part of African American combat Soldiers reached epidemic proportions in the institutional army in the decades following the Great War. African American combat troops were sparse during World War II because of these half-truths and biased perceptions. However, this research project found an alternative avenue that credited the African American combat Soldier's experiences to creating a positive outcome.

As in all previous wars during the existence of the United States, African American military service continued to be a source of pride, enthusiasm, and hope for the generations of African Americans who benefited from studying and appreciating their exploits. Civil rights advocates: such as Joel Sprigarn, W. E. B. Dubois, and even A. Phillip Randolph all cited the positive achievements of past African American combat

Soldiers as proof that the African American Soldier is fully competent in the conduct of war. The numbers of African American combat units at the initial phases of World War II may not have been spectacular, but the civil rights leaders of that time were inspired to formulate a strategy that afforded them leverage as a special committee that advised the United States President on racial matters. Unlike the creation of a special assistant to the Secretary of War during the Great War, this "black cabinet" actually made steps that resulted in definitive changes on the ground for African American troops. Emmett J. Scott's generation did make tremendous strides, especially in the establishment of the African American Officer's Candidacy School at Des Moines, Iowa; however, his reach was severely limited when it came to changes in policy through executive actions. This research concludes that the combat experiences of African American Soldiers during the Great War did not directly contribute to the building and usage of African American; however, these actions greatly assisted in perpetuating the efforts of civil rights leaders, such as A. Phillip Randolph and Mary McLeod Bethune. These efforts offered the greatest returns that African American Soldiers had ever experienced during the history of the United States. World War I African American combatant's actions yielded the first steps toward equality within the armed services and initiated the momentum responsible for fueling the modern civil rights movement toward civil equality for all African Americans.

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